Assessing Improvisation in Graded Music Examinations: Conflicting Practices and Perceptions

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Abstract

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For a practice that has influenced the development of most of the musical techniques and compositional forms of Western music (Ferand, 1965, p.5), 'improvisation' is challenging to define. Recently, the graded music examinations offered by the two largest UK-based music examination boards, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and Trinity College London (TCL), have added options to assess improvisation within their instrumental curricula without clearly defining what they mean by 'improvisation' or how they assess it. This thesis argues that the lack of consistent definitions by the two leading examination boards results in a lack validity and meaning since it is unclear to examination stakeholders (music teachers, students, examiners and syllabus authors) exactly what is being assessed and how.

This thesis investigates how 'improvisation' is *defined*, *practiced*, *assessed* and *perceived* within instrumental graded musical examinations. Evidence addressing the perspectives of the teaching-and-learning stakeholders is drawn from case-study observations and interviews of instrumental music lessons while candidates prepared for and completed an examination requiring improvisation. The perspectives of the examination board stakeholders are investigated through document analysis of the syllabuses, curricula and institutional websites of the examination boards in addition to interviews with examination board executives.

The findings provide an initial investigation into an unexplored intersection of music education, improvisation and the business of graded examination boards. A clearer understanding emerges of the cultural and social practices of improvisation both inside and outside of the hegemony of graded examinations and the teaching-and-learning communities that support them. The findings of this thesis challenge the examination boards and bring more clarity to their assessment practices. and can help guide music teachers and students through the currently unclear landscape of improvisation in the ABRSM and TCL examinations.

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

In accordance with the Faculty of Education guidelines, this thesis does not exceed 80,000 words excluding appendices, tables, footnotes and references.

Signed: _____

Patrick G. Olsen

Date: 28 February 2019

Dedicated to Sharon Ann Olsen

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List of Abbreviations

ABRSM	Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
GME(s)	Graded Music Examinations
LCM	London College of Music
OFQUAL	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
QDA	Qualitative Document Analysis
RAM	Royal Academy of Music, London
RCM	Royal College of Music, London
RSM(s)	Royal Schools of Music
TCL	Trinity College London, (the examination branch of TCM)
TCM	Trinity College of Music, (a performing arts conservatoire in London that was recently rebranded as Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance)
UCAS	University and Colleges Administration Service

Chapter One: Introduction

The Research and the Researcher

For a professional musician, I started late. Prior to my first music lesson when I was 15 years old, I had never thought much about music. There were no records, tapes or CDs in the house where I grew up. The only radio was a part of my parents' alarm clock; a feature that they never used. None of my friends played an instrument nor do I recall ever hearing live music being played in my small desert town in Arizona.

My interest in learning music came suddenly when I was reclining against a glass chest in the frozen food section of my town's grocery store (a great place to be because the temperature was over 45º Celsius outside). The store's loud speakers began playing Mexican pop music with a rich-sounding string section. The combination of the ice chest and the *Tejano* music had a big impact on me and at that moment I decided to ask my parents if I could learn to play an instrument.

My first teacher, Paul, was a New Yorker who spent the 1980's working under high pressure as a music arranger and copyist for Broadway musicals. After a decade of long hours and commutes, Paul burned out and bought some property in my home town. He tended a small cactus garden, occasionally dealt blackjack at a nearby casino across the state line and made constant use of a seemingly endless supply of coffee, cigarettes and music staff paper.

My father had a friend at a casino that could get cartons of Lucky Strike cigarettes for wholesale prices. Lucky Strikes were Paul's favourite brand and so my weekly hour-long music lessons were always paid for with two cartons of smokes. I was 15-years-old and transporting cartons of cigarettes across a desert in a car that I wasn't legally old enough to drive. That's the culture in which I learned to make music.

To study with Paul was to be exposed to lessons like, "Come over here and let me lay some *serious* shit on you. Hear that? That's Donny Hathaway…his live album. Check out that bass player. In the pocket! Tearing it up! Nothing flashy. He's just in

the pocket the whole fuckin' time and keepin' it all together. That's *music*, man. Yeah, that's music... Donny was a genius... took a nose-dive out of The Essex Tower Hotel in New York City. I don't know why... hit the pavement next to the guys dealing three-card monte. I used to walk by there sometimes... it's sad, really... Hey, did you bring my cigarettes?" Critical listening skills and music history were thus taught through culturally-imbued references like 'New York street life', 'in-the-pocket bass playing' and historical references like the 'sad story of Donny Hathaway'.

I spent three years studying with Paul. Lessons were intense and methodical focusing on ear training, harmony and writing/arranging music. We rarely talked about instrumental technique nor did we work on set repertoire; subjects that are the core of most of the UK-based graded music examinations. Instead we focused on what I was curious about and what Paul considered to be 'new' and 'hip'. Paul might give me a twentieth-century song that was on his mind and ask me to figure out the melody and chords for homework. This not only included playing the song on an instrument, I also had to be able to sing the melody and bass line using solfège syllables[1].

Reflecting on these lessons, I can see that he wanted to teach me the structure of the songs so that I might be better able to improvise with them in different contexts. Paul might say, "Play the upcoming chorus as a cha-cha. Instead of using V7 of ii try a substitute dominant going to the two-chord. What scale does that use and what are the available tensions? Great, can you make it sound 'Motown' now? What do you need to do to get that effect? Now play it in the style of Patrick Olsen and remember to have fun while you're doing it".

To satisfy such a challenge, I had to understand contexts such as a "cha-cha" (rhythms, forms, history) and the harmonic structure of a "substitute dominant chord" in definition and practice. From the standpoint of an educator, I can see that I was being assessed on improvisation through the practice of combining and re-contextualising what I knew into new specific contexts. At that time, it was just a

[1] Also called 'solfeggio' and 'sol-fa', these are the 'do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do' syllables practiced vocally.

game that was free from the concepts of ‘assessment’, ‘improvisation’, and ‘examination’.

After three years with Paul, I was good enough and fanatical enough to be admitted to Paul’s alma matter, The Berklee College of Music in Boston, a world-leading centre for modern music with a history of providing classes and publications related to improvisation. It was there that I realised my perceptions of improvisation were very different from my peers. Interacting with the musicians and traditions at Berklee, I became keenly aware that everything I knew about music was understood in relation to my music teacher, my parents (whom facilitated lessons, instruments and shared their musical influences with me) as well as the social environments where I played music with others. My awareness of the impact of social and cultural influences on my own perceptions of improvisation will thus re-appear throughout this thesis.

In my four years at Berklee, I was never assessed on ‘improvisation’. The word itself was not commonly used. I believe that this is because the practices associated with improvisation were natural and integral parts of our music making. It was creative, cultural and communicative; qualities that could not be removed from music making. As gender theorists speak of ‘doing gender’ (i.e. West & Zimmerman, 1987), we were continuously ‘doing improv’, meaning that improvisation was a social construct present in our everyday interactions, whether we had instruments in our hands or cups of coffee. It was therefore beyond my comprehension when I began my teaching career in Ireland and was told by the head music teachers that such practices were a separate subject “outside of the curriculum” that we usually did not have time to cover because it got in the way of preparing students for *the grades*.

1.1 Positioning the Researcher: Why graded music examinations?

"What are the grades?", "Who came up with this system?", "Why does everyone think this is so important?" were the three questions that initially came to mind. While this thesis will cover these questions in detail, a brief introduction related to my story is useful here. The *formal graded music examinations* of this research are created by UK-based examination boards that publish their own instrumental syllabuses and send specially-trained examiners to assess students on how well they perform the contents of the syllabuses (see 2.1). The most prominent UK examination boards, The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Trinity College (TCL) London College of Music and the Royal Irish Academy of Music were founded within a decade of each other in the late nineteenth century. Recent critical investigations of the origins of the examination boards and the developments of their qualifications unanimously report that the boards were competing against each other and that institutional prestige was central to these competitions. New professional and semi-professional qualifications for musical accomplishment as well as teacher certifications were created by each board and exported across the British Empire as the professional standard (see 2.1).

An example of how the standards and culture(s) of graded music examinations can be found embedded within music education can be drawn from my own experiences. I once taught at two primary schools in the same Irish village, one attached to a Catholic Jesuit tradition and the other to a Church of England tradition. All of the students were required to learn an instrument and used syllabuses corresponding to the school's culture. The Irish Catholic school used tin whistles and an Irish-based examination board (The Royal Irish Academy of Music) whereas the Anglican school used recorders and a UK-based examination board (ABRSM). Each school re-used the same syllabuses, repertoire and graded examinations every year without exception.

The schools linked the identities of their music programmes to specific music examination boards. A head teacher would explain, 'We offer our children ABRSM exams". My job as the music teacher was to get the students to play every note of the examination repertoire in unison well enough to get a distinction on the year-end

graded examination. There was no opportunity for improvisation, individuality or creative expression. It was simply not a part of the graded exam.

In another setting where I taught, private instrumental music schools, flexibility within the curricula was largely structured by the examination-related learning cultures associated with the instruments. For example, piano and violin lessons primarily drew from classical genre ABRSM and TCL exam books with sheet music within them. The guitar curricula had more flexibility due to the availability of a wider variety of syllabus genres such as TCL's *Rock and Pop* or London College's *Acoustic Guitar*. As a music teacher in Ireland, it became clear to me that from the moment that a student learning through these systems selects an instrument, their potential routes of study and their exposure to improvisation were largely predetermined by the examination board options available within the UK-based graded music examinations. While music historians, educators and the examination boards recognise the vital presence of improvisation in music, students working their way through common curricula such as the ABRSM classical grades might never engage with improvisation because it has not been included in the syllabuses.

I theorised that with the century-long tradition of classical music examinations, expected norms formed that informed the music teachers and their students about the examiners' expectations. Since improvisation was a more-recent addition to the curricula, it lacked the century-old conventions to inform teacher's and learner's perceptions of what was being examined and how. My teaching colleagues and I agreed that each of us had different understandings of improvisation in both definition and practice. We speculated that our perceptions were rooted in contexts such as our own educational and performance backgrounds, as well as our own musical interests. Furthermore, we were uncertain of exactly what the examiners were listening for when they were assessing improvisation and questioned how the examiners' and examination boards' own educations, backgrounds and interests affected the assessments of our students' musical improvisations. This raised specific questions that I later refined to become the main research questions of this thesis (see 2.5) such as how did the examination boards define and assess improvisation? How did their assessments shape the pedagogical practices of improvisation? Were the examiners qualified to assess improvisation and if not, were

the assessments valid and what meanings did the diplomas convey (e.g. what does a jazz piano diploma signify when the examiner may not have known anything about improvisation and the related contexts of jazz)?

The uncertainty led to professional tensions when combined with the financial and professional incentives of examinations. In my view, some teachers and schools persuaded students and their parents into doing examinations because it kept them as paying customers for a whole year (the time it takes to prepare for an examination) rather than just a few months. In addition, parents and schools judged the professional abilities of the instrumental music teachers by students' examination results. Thus, my professional reputation, financial livelihood and relationship with my employers in both private schools and primary schools were directly affected and consistently re-evaluated by my use of graded music examinations. These factors will be evaluated during this thesis as they relate to themes of social and financial classes in which improvisation and preparation for graded music examinations become increasingly expensive undertakings.

Since improvisation is increasingly being included with modern graded music syllabuses (Wright, 2013), clearly understanding how improvisation is defined, assessed and perceived by the examination stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, examination boards) is of growing concern within the culture of UK-based instrumental graded music examinations. When debating these issues with my colleagues, they unanimously agreed that someone needs to get to the bottom of this. I raised my hand and said, "I'll do it." From there, my journey to Cambridge and the writing of this thesis begins.

1.2 Structure of this research

This thesis is comprised of four chapters. *Introduction*, *Literature Review*, *Methodology*, and *Research Outcomes*. The contents of all four chapters and their relevance to the main research questions are:

Chapter One presents my background and experiences with both improvisation and graded examinations. After positioning the researcher, the section addresses why an investigation of improvisation in graded music examinations is necessary and how gaining clarity about the perceptions, practices and assessments of improvisation within ABRSM and TCL examinations is beneficial to music teachers, students and further researchers.

Chapter Two is the literature review. Key concepts of the research are defined and positioned within the body of recent literature including *examination boards* (2.1), *the stakeholders of graded music examinations* (2.2), *improvisation* (2.3) and *the summative assessment procedures used by the ABRSM and TCL examiners* (2.4). Questions emerging from the unknowns of the politics and practices of improvisation within formal graded examinations are highlighted in the end of the chapter and are used to generate the three main research questions of this thesis (see 2.5):

1. How is improvisation defined and practiced in graded instrumental music examinations?
2. How is improvisation assessed in graded instrumental music examinations?
3. What are the stakeholders' (student, teacher, parent, examiner and syllabus author) perceptions of improvisation in graded instrumental music examinations?

Chapter Three presents the methodology used to answer the research questions posed at the end of Chapter Two. The methodology opens with the research design (3.1), followed by the rationale for using a socio-cultural framework (3.1.1). A multi-case study is then detailed (3.2) that investigates exemplars of the classical and jazz curricula of ABRSM and TCL. Having established the theoretical structure of the

methodology, additional sections are presented that govern the use of the investigative methods: Observations of instrumental music lessons (3.3.2), interviews with examination stakeholders (3.3.2.2) and a document analysis of the ABRSM and TCL curricula and institutional websites (3.3.1). An investigation is designed to track improvisation from when it is added to the syllabuses through to the instrumental music lessons where it is interpreted and practiced. Lastly, executives from both examination boards are interviewed, giving them the chance to respond to the outcomes of my research.

Chapter Four presents the outcome of the analysis of the curricula and the case study that observed and interviewed participants in instrumental music lessons as they prepared for and completed an examination. The chapter is divided into three sections; each addressing a separate research question. Section 4.1 addresses the first research question by using evidence from analyses of the ABRSM and TCL curricula and websites to argue that they fail to adequately communicate the definitions and practices of 'improvisation' within their classical and jazz examinations. Section 0 addresses the second research question. *Assessment for qualification and certification* is used as the framework to interrogate how improvisation is assessed (syllabus regulations, marking rubrics, and examiner expertise). It is argued that both examination boards provide vague details regarding their assessments resulting in inadequate marking rubrics. The use of the problematic rubrics is argued to negatively impact the validity since it is unclear whether or not an examiner is an expert in improvisation and capable of awarding a qualification that includes improvisation.

Section 4.3 addresses the third research question by exploring the perceptions of the stakeholders regarding the assessment of improvisation. This section argues that as a result of the vague/insufficient definitions practices and inadequate assessment regulations of improvisation, each stakeholder may have a different perception of improvisation. The consequence of the multiple perceptions is that (a) it is not clear whose perceptions are being assessed and (b) ecological validity is challenged by music teachers who shape perceptions that improvisation within the exams is an 'unnatural' context that is distinct from 'authentic' improvisation.

Section 4.4 connects the outcomes of the chapter by weaving the threads of argument together to form a narrative that summarises Chapter Four. Themes linking the research questions include:

- A lack of shared *definitions*, *practices*, and *perceptions* of improvisation;
- weakened validity from lack of clarity and consensus about what was being assessed;
- perceptions that 'improvisation' within the context of graded examinations was 'artificial' and therefore lacked real-world validity;
- lack of faith in the examiners to be qualified to make meaningful assessments.

Addressing these themes and criticisms, I argue that they do not need to exist. By adopting standard useable definitions and practices of improvisation with assessments to match, rather than the current practice of not defining improvisation and assessing with rubrics designed for non-improvised music, the bullet-pointed problems could be mitigated.

Section 4.5 concludes with a discussion that looks towards the future by connecting the outcomes of this thesis, reflections on the influence of the researcher on the findings and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

For a system of music education that is used globally by hundreds of thousands of music students every year, there are relatively few research studies of graded music examinations. In general, the research field is comprised of criticisms of the assessments (e.g. Ross, 2009; Salaman, 1994), examiners (Dumlavwalla, 2011), frictions between the hegemony of the examinations versus local/indigenous musical cultures (e.g. Mitchell, 2012; Tye, 2004), and investigations of the colonial origins and images of the boards as authorities of classical music (Johnson-Hill, 2015; Wright, 2013). To the best of my knowledge, as of 2017 there have been no published studies on the assessment of improvisation within the graded music examinations.

Lacking a direct foundation of previous studies on improvisation in graded examinations upon which to build, this literature will draw together separate strands of research to establish a foundation of knowledge to explore how improvisation is defined, practiced and assessed within graded music examinations. The first section (2.1) identifies the main examination boards of this research and addresses their institutional hegemony and their origins as colonial authorities of classical music. After addressing the examination boards, the second section (2.2) identifies five key stakeholders through research studies of instrumental teaching-and-learning dynamics (teacher, student, parent) and music examination boards (examiners, syllabus authors). The third section (2.3) reviews the practices and philosophical interpretations of improvisation in order to distil a definition of 'improvisation'. The fourth section (2.4) addresses assessment practices and the processes of evaluation available to music examiners. The chapter concludes with the formulation of three main research questions drawn from the gaps in the literature that address how 'improvisation' is defined, practiced, assessed and perceived within the contexts of graded music examinations.

2.1 The Examination Boards: ABRSM & Trinity College London

The two dominant examination boards, The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and Trinity College London (TCL) are London-based assessment organisations that publish materials for and administer examinations at approved test-centres around the world. The ABRSM, who controls 70% of the UK and international markets, stated that they examined 630,000 candidates in 93 countries in 2016;[2] half of which were UK-based candidates (ABRSM, 2014a). Confidence in their examinations is provided by Ofqual,[3] who has accredited both the ABRSM[4] and TCL[5] to award diploma qualifications within the UK National Qualification Framework. In addition, the standards of the examination boards have influenced the UCAS Tariff,[6] meaning that candidates succeeding at grades 6-8 can be awarded points towards UK university applications.

Prior to becoming highly accredited world-spanning institutions, the ABRSM and TCL began as fledgling external examinations offered by newly-established music conservatories as an opportunity to build prestige and additional employment opportunities. The ABRSM and TCL began in the late nineteenth century in 'response to the rising professional status of music and musicians' (Dumlavwalla, 2011, p. 6) within a Victorian-era movement towards professional accreditation and standardisation (i.e. Johnson-Hill, 2015; Wright, 2013).

The first graded music examinations were offered by Trinity College of Music (TCL's forerunner) in 1877 to professional and amateur members of the public. One of the chief reasons for offering the examinations was to provide additional income to the poorly-paid conservatoire teachers of the time (Wright, 2013). Similar examinations were soon offered by the London College of Music in 1887, while two rival institutions, the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music partnered

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[2] Retrieved from: https://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 25 August 2017.
[3] Ofqual (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) is the UK government's qualifications and assessment regulator.
[4] Retrieved from: https://gb.abrsm.org/en/our-exams/information-and-regulations/exam-regulation-and-ucas-points/ 20 August 2017
[5] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/site/?id=1046 20August 2017
[6] UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) is a UK-based board that provides the undergraduate application process for many British universities.

together to form the Associated Board of Royal Music Schools in 1889 (Grove, 2009).

In addition to providing extra funds to the examination boards and examiners, the examinations provided summative assessment and accreditation to amateur musicians who were not able to spend three full-time years at Trinity College. A graded examination diploma from Trinity College thus served to distinguish a music performer/music teacher above those without accreditation but was still considered less prestigious than a diploma earned from full-time conservatoire study. Wright's (2013) conclusion was that by attaching their name to highly skilled musicians, Trinity College of Music and the ABRSM increased their own prestige, reach and influence while simultaneously putting 'unqualified' musicians out of business.

There is one notable difference between literature describing the original reasons that the ABRSM and TCL published their first examinations. One of the ABRSM's initial reasons for offering examinations was that their parent conservatories, the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music, intended to create benchmarks purposefully designed to improve the quality of students admitted to their institutions (Salaman, 1994; Wright 2013). Sources describing the origins of TCL's examinations did not stress their desire to actively raise the standard of their parent conservatoire's applicants, but rather 'inaugurate a popular education movement' (Wright, 2013, p. 49) while increasing the revenue of the newly established institution (*ibid*).

Going much deeper than Wright (2013) or Dumlavwalla (2011) into the zeitgeist that birthed the graded music examinations, Johnson-Hill's (2015) PhD thesis situated the examination boards in an era of British imperialism that introduced elite models of music pedagogy influenced by 'class, race and sociologies of imperial surveillance' (2015, p. ii). Johnson-Hill presented convincing evidence that the examination boards 'deliberately overwrote the history of working-class and missionary systems of music teaching' in an 1890's 'crisis of legitimation' (p. ii). At the heart of the crisis of legitimation, according to Johnson-Hill, was a battle for prestige. Under this ethos, Wright's (2013) descriptions of parish music teachers losing their jobs to teachers with more-prestigious London qualifications were

transplanted to a global colonial scale in which values and perceptions of legitimacy were impressed upon foreign musical cultures such as those of South Africa, Malaysia and Canada; a situation that many researchers assert still echoes in the current examinations (i.e. Johnson-Hill, 2015; Kok, 2011; Ross, 2009; Dumlavwalla; 2011).

2.1.1 Critical perspectives on the ABRSM & TCL.

The modern critical literature on examination boards began with Salaman's (1994) interrogation of the roles and benefits of graded music examinations; particularly classical ABRSM exams. Generalising his arguments to similar examinations offered by other boards, Salaman (1994, p 210-212) identified and questioned five assumed benefits of taking a graded music examination including: (1) increased student motivation (2) goal-setting (3) providing a more-structured curriculum (4) external measurements of student progress (4) increased professional prestige for the teachers (5) students learn solo performance skills (Salaman did not identify class or social/financial status).

This section presents these perceived benefits next to Salaman's corresponding interrogations. For example, Salaman (1994) argued that the perceived benefit of exams providing a more-structured curriculum incorrectly assumed that all the exam candidates learned linearly towards the same goal. Regarding the perceived benefit that exams help students and teachers to set goals, Salaman argued that the goal was not always to make the student a better musician, but rather to achieve a high mark on the examination.

Table 1 Interrogating the perceived benefits of graded examinations.

Perceived Benefits of Graded Music Examinations	Salaman's (1994) Interrogations
Increased student motivation	Perhaps students are motivated by examinations to achieve good exam results rather than being motivated to make music.
Exams provide a more-structured curriculum	Providing a more-structured curriculum assumes that all students learn linearly towards the same goal.
Helps students and teachers set goals	The goal is often assumed to be making the student a better musician. However, the goal can actually be to score a high mark on the graded examination.
Increased professional prestige for the teachers of high-scoring students	The external measurement of student ability and progress is not entirely accurate or objective and therefore not an accurate measure of a teacher.
Students learn solo performance skills	Students that focus on solo examinations can miss out on ensemble playing.

The interrogations of assumptions underpinning graded music examinations shown in Table 1 clearly illustrate that the various stakeholders of graded music examinations (teachers, students, parents and examiners) could have very different perceptions regarding the assumed benefits of graded music examinations.[7]

Salaman (1994) briefly made one other observation of the graded exam syllabuses that could be very relevant to improvisation: the technical exercises and aural/sight singing tests are often out of context with the repertoire. For example, a candidate may be required to play a C harmonic minor scale even though neither that scale nor key appear in the examinable repertoire. A comparison of the 2017 ABRSM and TCL classical and jazz syllabuses revealed that this was still largely true indicating that grade-specific improvisation skills, technical skills and repertoire do not necessarily correspond to each other. This suggests that improvisation could be presented in the

[7] This point about the differences in perceptions is key to my third research question which asks: What are the stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation in graded instrumental music examinations?

syllabuses as extra tasks/skills in addition to the standard technical skills and repertoire (addressed in 4.3.2.1).

A fair criticism of Salaman's research was that he failed to provide empirical evidence linked to 'the main stakeholders in the examinations system' and instead relied on opinions based in experiences with ABRSM exams as a music student and later as a teacher (Mitchell, 2012, p. 36). While I agree with Mitchell's criticism, I would add that Salaman's opinions have been valuable for their role in stimulating subsequent research. Moreover, his interrogations of the perceived benefits of graded music examinations influence my research because they elegantly demonstrate that the various examination stakeholders can have different perceptions of improvisation including dissonances between goals (pedagogical or exam-specific) and measurements of achievement.

While Salaman's article had strong words but little empirical evidence, Babin (2005) provided robust data with cautiously-worded conclusions. Babin (*ibid*) conducted a thorough document analysis of the examination requirements within piano syllabuses of UK-based examination boards operating in Canada.[8] She found that while each curriculum differed in content, they all shared three common requirements: (1) to demonstrate technical skills through grade-specific scales, arpeggios and related exercises; (2) to play multiple pieces of repertoire from different historical eras; and (3) to demonstrate sight-reading and aural recognition skills (pp. 162-163). These three requirements are familiar to many instrumental music teachers and students as the syllabus categories of *Technical Skills, Performance*, and *Aural Skills*. Babin confirmed through analysis what Salaman (1994) suggested, that there are three standard categories within each syllabus and the grade-specific contents of each commonly fail to correspond across categories.

Babin (2005) concluded that the 2005 examination syllabuses were out of touch with modern music making and concluded with an unanswered question of whether or not graded music examinations should be allowed to retain their central role in Canadian

[8] While Babin did not investigate curricula containing improvisation, her use of document analysis to compare and contrast elements of each syllabus provided a clear methodology for future investigations.

piano pedagogy. Many of the 2017 syllabuses by the same examination boards that Babin analysed (this includes the ABRSM and TCL) have added varying degrees of improvisation options and improvisation-rich genres like jazz and pop to their syllabuses. This may indicate that: (a) improvisation is increasingly being recognised as being significant for music making; (b) the addition of newer genres that include improvisation provides advantages (e.g. image, marketing, prestige) to examination boards that are in competition with each other.

Picking up on the theme of 'culture' in graded music examinations, Tye (2004) explored cultural values and parental expectations in his post-colonial analysis of the influence of the ABRSM in Malaysia. Focusing on Penang, Tye found that parents of music exam candidates expected their children to participate in examinations so that they could have evidence of their children's music accomplishments. Many of the parents reported that they were looking for proof of music achievement in the same way that they were looking for evidence of academic achievements, such as school science or history exams. These data supported Salaman's (1994) argument that increased motivation could be related to the goal of getting a high score on the exam rather to become a better musician and provided further evidence and insight into differences of perceptions between teaching-and-learning stakeholders regarding the same assessment.

Relating the different perceptions of the same examinations to culture, Tye (2004) found that since there are no organisations that award piano teaching qualifications in Malaysia, local teachers often relied on their students' examination results to establish and raise their own professional prestige; a point also reported by Babin (2005) in Canada, and Salaman (1994) in the UK. While Babin and Salaman suggested that some students might only be learning examination repertoire and nothing else, Tye provided empirical evidence that graded examination repertoire was all that many of the piano students in Penang were learning to play. Tye did not mention improvisation but one can draw from Salaman (1994) to speculate that if these conditions have not changed much since 2004, any improvisation that students would have been exposed to would have been presented as what was necessary for the exam, rather than what was enriching for the student.

From this research one could also wonder how generations of music students and teachers have learned or taught solely from the ABRSM syllabuses with no improvisation could respond to improvisation options in new syllabuses. What motivation would they have for selecting improvisation and how would the perceived values of improvisation be negotiated between the goals to make a better musician versus the goal to achieve the highest exam score (i.e. teaching to the test)?[9]

Tye's (2004) investigation of non-improvised classical music concluded that the large presence of the ABRSM piano examinations in Penang is a product of colonialism and had a negative impact on local piano pedagogical practice and recommended that a locally developed curriculum would be more relevant to his country and culture than a UK-based examination system dominated by Western classical music culture. I was not convinced by Tye's conclusion that a local examination board would better suit his culture's needs because it failed to consider the parents' clearly-documented reasons for enrolling their students in music lessons: to attain ABRSM accreditation that will later be used to make the students stand-out when applying to highly-competitive universities. However, Tye's research was poignant because it demonstrated clear conflicts of cultures as related to the roles and demands in which the music examination stakeholders have become entrenched around the world.

The studies in this section have touched upon the differences in perceptions of the stakeholders but none of them have addressed improvisation and none have focused on the same set of stakeholders. For example, Salaman (1994) focused on students and examiners. Tye (2004) looked at parents and teachers. Babin (2005) focused on the authors of the syllabuses. From the gaps in knowledge, I have distilled the following research question for this thesis: *What are the stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation in graded instrumental music examinations?* Before addressing this question, it is necessary to identify the stakeholders of improvisation in graded music examinations.

[9] These questions will be addressed as part of the research outcomes in section 4.3.

2.2 Stakeholders of Graded Music Examinations

The stakeholders of graded music examinations as identified in the research literature can be grouped into two general categories: *examination board stakeholders* (e.g. Babin, 2005; Mitchell, 2012; Dumlavwalla, 2011) and *teaching-and-learning stakeholders* (Tye, 2004; Davidson & Scutt, 1999). These two groupings are illustrated for clarity in the following figure:

Figure 1 The stakeholders of graded music examinations.

Within the two general categories I have nested five types of stakeholders distinguished by their roles: *examiners*, *syllabus authors*, *teachers*, *students* and *parents*. For example, Babin's (2005) focus on the syllabus authors' decisions underpinning the syllabuses and Dumlavwalla's focus on how examiners are trained are grouped with *Examination board stakeholders*. Under the category of 'teaching-and-learning stakeholders' are the students, parents and teachers identified in research on instrumental music lessons such as Tye's (2004) surveys of teachers and parents or Creech's (2010; 2006) and Davison & Scutt's (1999) explorations of instrumental music lessons.

The following section presents a critical review of the literature detailing the different stakeholders of graded music examinations beginning with examination board stakeholders (examiners and syllabus authors) followed by the teaching-and-learning stakeholders (teacher, student, parents). The five key stakeholders of this thesis will be identified along with salient intra-category dynamics (i.e. teacher/ student/ parent relationships) and between-category dynamics such as tensions between teaching-and-learning environments and the examination boards.

2.2.1 Examination board stakeholders: examiners & syllabus authors.

In the few published research studies addressing the members of the graded music examination boards, the examiners tend to be depicted as silent authorities (e.g. Ross, 2009; Salaman, 1994) that can generate tensions in the lives of the music teachers, students and parents (e.g. Creech, 2006; Davidson & Scutt, 1999). These perceptions of examiners are not surprising since they are primarily drawn from researchers, teachers and students involved with graded music examinations rather than from the examiners themselves. The most detailed exploration of examiners, Dumlavwalla's (2011) PhD thesis, explored the training and multiple roles of examiners in a Canadian music examination board and brought forward a more-rounded account of professionals under constant pressure who commonly reported feeling a lack of agency in their position as an examiner.

Ross' (2009) comparison of music examiners concluded that 'the external examiner's primary function is to validate and authenticate course offerings and assessment outcomes' (p. 478). Beyond using a rubric to 'validate' candidates' performances, Dumlavwalla (2011) points out that examiners are responsible for additional roles such as administrator (keeping strict time tables, confirming candidate identities), being social (greeting every candidate and making them feel comfortable throughout the examination), performing test stimuli (playing harmonic sequences or melodic intervals at a piano) and writing individual feedback for each candidate.

The findings of both Ross (2009) and Dumlavwalla (2011) agree that the title of 'examiner' conveys great authority and meaning within the culture of graded music examination. There are however differences between their depictions of that authority. For example, Ross (2009) argued that examiners are a collective representation of an examination board and as such, have more authority than the candidates, teachers and parents. She further clarified:

> *…the concept of 'recognition' [of examiner and examination board authority] is bounded by social and cultural environment and expectations…its 'meaning' is also determined by political, geographical and social-cultural infrastructures…Hence, the external music examiner represents a respected authority in evaluating the comparative worth of a musical output.* (Ross, 2009, p. 478)

Delving further beneath this perception of authority, Dumlavwalla's (2011) interviews with examiners revealed their individual struggles to meet the demands of the customers and the board that employed them; namely the strict timeframes, deadlines, abundance of paperwork, frequent changing of geographic location and the resulting cultural differences, high expectations from other stakeholders that their assessments would be accurate, random quality assurance checks from the examination board, plus the necessity of being polite and calming to every candidate, teacher and parent that they met. Thus, while Ross (2009) reported the teaching-and-learning communities perceived examiners as authorities held up by social and political infrastructures, Dumlavwalla's reported the examiners' perspectives of feeling powerless to express their own sets of beliefs, values and perceptions of the curricula beneath under the weight of the same social and political structure. None of these researchers investigated improvisation and it is currently unknown how the added challenges of assessing improvisation (i.e. that it can be unexpected, novel and highly individual) affect or are affected by the individuals that comprise the collective authority of the examination boards.

Another salient point of agreement and contention concerns the impact of the examiners on the teaching-and-learning stakeholders. While the research is unanimous in stating that graded music examiners are not directly involved in the teaching of the course that they are examining, a case could be made that they are indirectly involved in the teaching and learning. For Ross (2009), examiners "shape musical practice and conduct" as well as social perception of music examinations and music lessons. The studies by Tye (2004), Babin, (2005), Dumlavwalla (2011) and Mitchell (2012) all reached similar conclusions. It can be stated with confidence that while examiners never teach the music students, their influence in part shapes music lessons and interactions between other examination stakeholders. Their influence has been noted leading up to the examinations as the teachers and

students prepare to impress the examiner (Davidson & Scutt, 1999) and when recognising the validity of the examiners' judgements about 'the comparative worth of a musical output' (Ross, 2009, p. 478) is upheld by the stakeholders that buy-in to the authority of the graded examination systems.

One potential source of influence drawn from research on external examiners (i.e. Swain, 2008) but absent from the literature on graded music examinations, are the comment sheets written by the examiners and delivered to the candidates. Dumlavwalla's (2011) research has shown that examiners draw upon rubrics for the specific content and language of their comments, but it is currently unknown how examiners comment on improvisation, a topic that might not be included in the marking rubrics.[10]

One crucial examination board stakeholder, the chief syllabus author, is unmentioned in nearly all of the research on graded music examinations with the notable exception of Babin's (2005) comparison of graded examination syllabuses. It is peculiar that the individuals responsible for the final decisions and ongoing changes of the performance repertoire, technical studies and aural skills required at each grade level for each instrument and genre for hundreds of thousands of examinations are absent from the research literature. In regard to improvisation, multiple questions are raised about their perceptions of improvisation. Why is improvisation included in some syllabuses but not others? How did they make distinctions between improvisation grade levels? How do the syllabus authors define improvisation and are those definitions standardised for the examiners?[11]

[10] This topic will be further addressed in 0 in regard to assessment practices. Research outcomes will be addressed throughout 4.3.2.
[11] These questions about the syllabus authors perceptions of improvisation will be addressed in section 4.3. Questions about how improvisation is defined for the purposes of the syllabuses will be addressed in section 4.1.1.

2.2.2 Teaching-and-learning stakeholders: teachers, students and parents.

While there have been an increasing amount of studies exploring the relationships between three key stakeholders, *music teachers*, *students* and *parents* (Creech, 2012; 2010; Ho, 2009; Creech & Hallam, 2009; Creech, 2006), there have been few investigations of the roles and relationships of these stakeholders as they work towards a graded music examination. One important exception was Davidson and Scutt's (1999) six-month study of four teachers, eighteen students and their parents as they prepared for an ABRSM classical examination. Their observation schedule enabled them to ascertain how the participants' relationships were influenced by the examination process before, during and after the exam. In congruence with Tye (2004) and Ross (2011), Davidson & Scutt (1999) found that the examinations were overwhelmingly viewed by students and parents as a benchmark that enabled the progress of the students to be determined in comparison to 'external standards' (p. 89). In general, both students and parents appreciated the external recognition given by the examiners and examinations with some parents reporting that they viewed examinations as a return on their financial and time investment.

Davidson and Scutt (1999) had three other findings that are relevant to this chapter's task of addressing graded music examinations: (1) While there were examples of parents and teachers working together to build students' confidence, their efforts were not always consistent or coordinated. For example, while some parents and teachers had the specific goal of receiving a 'Distinction' on the exam, some parents and teachers did not explain that there was a difference between different types of passing (e.g. *Pass*, *Merit* or *Distinction*) in order to increase the students' feelings of accomplishment if they received a 'Pass' rather than a 'Distinction'. This raises a question about how improvisation is perceived in relation to helping or hurting the chances of receiving a Distinction.

(2) Parent-teacher-student relationships used performance and learning goals to enhance student motivation. The researchers' hypothesis was that examinations could provide a positive influence on student motivation if the examinations were approached as a learning goal. However, if the students' reasons for participating

were primarily focused on earning distinctions on their certificates, then participating in examinations would be negative to the students' long-term learning. The majority of the students in the study had long-term learning goals in mind and their goals were supported by their teachers providing them with music or exercises that were not a part of the upcoming examinations. It is currently unclear about how improvisation is perceived in terms of it being part of a long-term learning goal or whether there is an improvisation that can be used when teaching to the test. Nor is it known how students' motivations would be impacted by either.

(3) The teachers reported feeling personally invested in the examinations due to their wide range of responsibilities. These included: determining which exam their students take and registering the students for those examination, boosting confidence and motivation, while simultaneously building personal relationships with students and parents. In addition, the teachers reported a large amount of stress being generated by the examinations due to concerns over the effect that examination results might have on their professional reputations.

While the discussion thus far has primarily focused on the motivating effect of examinations on music students, Davidson and Scutt's (1999) findings can be interpreted as showing the motivating effects that examinations have on music teachers' structuring of lessons. Taking into account the finding that teachers' personal investments with examination results motivated many to find the most effective ways of teaching and preparing the students for the graded music exams, a question arises about how having students assessed on improvisation might impact the structuring of music lessons and the ways in which improvisation is practiced in instrumental music lessons (i.e. is long-term learning the teacher's goal of improvisation or is it to achieve high marks on the examination?).

While Davidson and Scutt's (1999) study provided useful groundwork under the relationship between the parents, students and teachers involved in preparing for instrumental graded examinations, several key areas of research were not included. First and foremost, 'improvisation' was absent from the study. Several new options have been added to the curriculum since their study that include improvisation and it is currently unclear how the potential of assessing improvisation might affect a

teacher's selection of a syllabus or how that decision would be perceived by the student and parents. While the research indicates parents have expectations regarding children's' preparations for a graded music examination (Ross, 2009; Babin, 2005; Tye, 2004; Davidson & Scutt, 1999) it is unclear what parental expectations are when their child is practicing improvisation rather than a familiar tune for an examination. Lastly, since the publication of the Davidson and Scutt study, other research has addressed the middle-class status imbued in the graded music examinations (e.g. Bull, 2015) but no one has yet addressed how improvisation is being positioned within the socio-economics of graded music examinations.

2.3 Understanding 'Improvisation'

While many people have a general idea of what music improvisation is, a perusal of music literature reveals many conflicting definitions. The mystery is well-captured by Hall (2009) in his book on free improvisation for musicians:

> *Improvisation is elegantly simple. It's compellingly complex. It's plain as day and mysterious as a dream. It's so easy to do that everyone does it all the time, yet so difficult to pin down that no one can say exactly how to do it. There are as many ways to improvise as there are improvisers.* (p. 1)

Hall poetically informs us that improvisation is too complex a topic for a single definition. Hall describes improvisation as a *thing*. Then in describing the mystery of 'how to do it', improvisation is spoken of as a *practice*. From Hall, one can extract that understandings of improvisation can simultaneously consider improvisation as a product and a practice.

A similar conclusion is reached by Derek Bailey (1993) in his influential book of interviews with improvisers from different global musical cultures. When speaking with a sitar player from India about *ragas*, a type of music that the author understands to be a framework for improvisation, the sitar player explains that most

of his music is created in the moment using traditional melodies (i.e. raags) and that in the Indian classical traditions, he could never repeat the same piece of music in the same way. When Bailey asked about the musician's approach to improvisation, the Indian musician replied that he understood Bailey's use of the word 'improvisation' as a Western concept that differed from the concepts within the culture and contexts of classical Indian music. From their conversation, one could gather that improvisation is viewed in some musical cultures as integral and inseparable to making music. This contrasts with Western classical music views that improvisation is a distinct entity that may be removed from the practices of performance and composition (i.e. the historical absence of improvisation from ABRSM and TCL curricula).

The interview with the Indian sitar player also reveals that it is possible for a musician to be aware of different perceptions of improvisation (e.g. raga culture, jazz), but to only incorporate and assess one when performing within their musical traditions. Bailey (1993) concludes that the better a performer becomes at their studied musical idiom (an Indian classical musician studies Indian music, a jazz musician studies jazz, etc.), the more specialized their abilities become. Bailey builds a critical case against standard European instrumental pedagogy for thinking themselves of being an exception to this principle, rather than accepting that they are a good example of it. Bailey concludes that European music education systems such as the UK graded music examinations equip "a musician with the ability to perform the standard European repertoire and its derivations, and ... limits its adherents' ability to perform in other musical areas" such as improvisation (p. 117). This prompts the crucial point that when undergoing the process of a graded music examination, those involved must navigate between their contemporary perceptions of improvisation and the centuries of highly-specialised repertoire and styles published in the ABRSM and TCL curricula. The question then arises: *Whose perceptions of improvisation are being expressed and assessed?*

It follows that graded examinations should have clear definitions of what is meant by 'improvisation' and 'improvise' in their curricula so that it is clearly understood by all examination stakeholders exactly what is being assessed within the examination and how. However, an exploration of the 2017 ABRSM and TCL classical and jazz

curricula (see 4.1-4.2) reveals vaguely-worded, minimal or no references to what they mean by 'improvisation' or 'improvise' in their syllabuses or assessment guidelines. This raises a key question: *How does an examination board examine 'improvisation' when they do not (or cannot) provide a clear and consistent definition of 'improvisation'?*[12]

2.3.1 Improvisation in the era of the graded examination boards.

The following section opens by outlining and addressing the relevant factors that have shaped perceptions of improvisation from the founding of the examination boards in the nineteenth century (see 2.2) to the present. From the historical outline, two dominant perceptions of improvisation emerge: improvisation as a *product* assessed by subject/object aesthetic theories and improvisation as a *practice* assessed by more holistic theories. After presenting and evaluating critical views of improvisation and the 'unwritten rules' of Western art music (Benson, 2003), it will emerge that the examination boards have focused their assessments on 'products' in the Western music canon such as published compositions rather than practices.

The decline of improvisation in Western art music

The rise of graded examinations in the late nineteenth century occurred as improvisation was nearing the bottom of a steady decline in Western art music. The loss of popularity and relevance of improvisation was prompted by a combination of factors including the changes in musicians' training, their practical job market, the increased availability of sheet music and a philosophical shift that placed more importance on the interpretation of a published composition rather than spontaneous practice of music making.

An excellent starting point for modern criticism of improvisation in Western art music comes from Moore's (1992) expansive analysis of the decline of improvisation.

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[12] This question, the lack of clarity within the curricula, and the resultant lack of credibility within the assessments will be addressed in section 4.1 as they relate to the first research question: *How is improvisation defined and practiced in graded instrumental music examinations?*

Moore makes the keen observation that the waning and near-disappearance of improvisation was not systematically catalogued as it occurred. He argues that this lack of critical reflection persists and that most twentieth-century scholars researching improvisation draw upon historical texts from the seventeenth through mid-nineteenth centuries rather than critically consider more-modern developments. Moore attributes the lack of critical interest in improvisation as being part of the "modern notions governing the performance of art music" (p. 62) that discourage the inclusion of improvisation in serious music making. Ironically, Moore's article ignores modern developments of improvisation as much as the critics he chides.

Distilling Moore's (1992) wide list of occurrences into a more-focused narrative, the decline of improvisation in Western art music began with the changes of performance contexts and patrons in the late eighteenth century. In tandem with the rise of the middle classes, art music became a commodity that could be consumed by more people. This shifted performances from where they had been in royal courts to middle-class parlours and later public auditoriums (*ibid*). With the increase in availability of art music, there was a demand for more performers. This demand was met with a parallel shift in music pedagogy and the creation of classical conservatoires. Thus, the previous master/apprentice systems of music pedagogy associated with court music gave way to formal study being made available to larger numbers of students (p. 71). The conservatoire pedagogy was significantly shaped by the simultaneous rise of the sheet music publishing industry, which was experiencing increases in practicality and affordability of printing. In tandem with the proliferation of published sheet music, conservatoire pedagogy helped establish a canon of eighteenth and nineteenth-century repertoire that successive generations of music performers, students and teachers, were required to assimilate.[13] The access to printed repertoire encouraged perceptions in conservatoire students, teachers and graduates that the performance of most Western art music does not generally tolerate deviation from the published scores and composers' intentions (*ibid*).

[13] An insightful point made by Woosley (2012) not stated by Moore (1992) is that during the nineteenth century, performers were increasingly expected to perform solo recitals entirely from memory. Doing so requires dedicating more time to memorising the increasing amount of canon repertoire thereby reducing the amount of time a performer can dedicate to improvisation.

While Moore (1992) provides a very useful overview of the decline of improvisation in Western art music, the author does not go into detail regarding the effects of notation and increased music literacy on improvisation. Also missing are the related philosophical shifts that impacted perceptions of improvisation. A thorough exploration of the gaps in Moore's research can be found in Benson's (2003) deeper analyses of the how the "unwritten rules" (p. 3) of Western art music have developed. Exploring the nineteenth-century increase in published music in greater depth, Benson makes a strong case that music literacy and conservatoire pedagogy led to a shift in performance paradigm. Performers transitioned from using notated sketches in which they were expected to improvisation within specific contexts (e.g. figured bass accompaniment)[14] to thoroughly-notated professionally-printed scores in which 'improvisation' was increasingly written and notated by the composers. These completed scores, through a combination of conservatoire pedagogy and flourishing publishing industry, developed into an historical canon from which Western musicians were expected to study and perform.

Relating this to graded music examinations, selections of the published canon are included in the performance sections of graded music examinations, meaning that student musicians learning through graded exams are exposed to the canon from their first lessons. Nested with the selections from the Western canon and the influences of conservatoire pedagogy are the "unwritten rules" (Benson, 2003) and "modern notions" (Moore, 1992) of Western art music that discourage or overlook the practice of improvisation.

Improvisation's value within the canon

A great value of Benson's (2003) analysis is that it positions improvisation within the philosophical ideals of *Werktreue* (true work) in Western art music (p. 3-5), meaning that there is an overwhelming Western assumption that the field of serious music is primarily about the creation and preservation of music *works*. Integral to this are the ideals of *Texttreue* (true text), which stress preservation and faithfulness to a written score (p. 5). Within the *true work/true text* frameworks, the performer of Western art

[14] The use of notated sketches (i.e. a 'lead sheet') is commonly used in contemporary popular music contexts. Both ABRSM and TCL publish their jazz examination repertoire as lead sheets.

music has the conservationist role of helping to preserve the true works through faithful interpretation of the true text. Rather than being a creator and/or improviser, the modern *Werktreue* performer's role is more of a middleman who conveys the *true work* to the listener. This view of Western art music and its "unwritten rules" ("modern notions" in Moore's 1992 language) coincides with the development of the UK-based graded music examination boards and gives insight into their early philosophical positions, namely the emphasis on faithfully interpreting published sheet music selected from a true work within the canon of published art music; a position that leaves little to no room for improvisation. There is debate on the position of improvisation within that little room, whether improvisation can be part of the formal composition or whether it can be part of the performance. The following section outlines the opposing positions within the debate.

2.3.2 Music(al) improvisation: practice or product?

Improvisation as a product

There is a strong consensus in modern critical literature of Western art music that since the nineteenth century, improvisation has been chiefly evaluated through *aesthetic experience* (e.g. Alperson; 2014, Love, 2003; Adorno & Leppert, 2002; Sparshott,1982). In an exhaustive analysis of the nineteenth-century philosophical shifts, Love (2003) links the aesthetic experience of improvisation to aesthetic theories of how a person might assess a painting or vase in a museum. Within this framework, improvisation is perceived as an artistic object (like a painting or vase) that is presented to a subject (a listener) for evaluation. Through aesthetic experience, one can assess the product of the artist without reference to the intentions of the object's creator, the meaning behind the creation or the specific contexts in which it was created. While this way may be useful for evaluating aspects of an object of art and comparisons between objects, the subject/object aesthetic experience neglects what may be the most important to the improviser (and thus graded music examination candidates): their artistic intentions and the practices used by the improvisers within specific contexts to realise their intentions.

Combining Love's (2003) philosophical analysis with Benson's (2003) evaluation of the influences of *Werktreue* and *Texttreue* in modern Western art music, there remains some debate as to how improvisation is situated within the overall *work* that is being assessed. Theorists of Western art music overwhelmingly depict improvisation as being located in a dichotomy between *composition* and *performance* (Adorno, 1997; Sparshott, 1982) while struggling to define clear borders between them (i.e. Williams, 2017; Love, 2003).

The opposing views within the debate are most clearly developed in opposing positions held by Adorno (1997; Adorno & Leppert, 2002) and Sparshott (1982). Championing the *composition* as the central object of value, Adorno and Leppert (2002) argue that it is the listener's duty to evaluate the composition, not the performance that achieves it or an improvisation within it. Adorno argues that formal composition is a higher art than improvisation and that while improvisation may contribute to a composition and the overall performance, improvisation is inherently inferior to composition as a work of art. Through this logic, Adorno contentiously concludes that the frequent use of improvisation within jazz renders the genre of jazz to be inferior to classical music since classical music is largely free of improvisation.

Setting aside the contentious undertones within Adorno's arguments (e.g. assumed superiority of Western European over African American music cultures), his view of the supremacy of composition is highly problematic for assessing improvisation. By arguing that for improvisation to have value, it must be an extension of the composition not the performance, Adorno leaves an unanswered question about the lack of a clear border between composition and improvisation. As Benson (2003, p. 24) pointed out, there is a bipolar schema in modern Western art music with *composition* on one pole and *performance* on the other. *Improvisation* does not fit clearly within the axis of that schema. In regard to the defining and assessing of improvisation within graded music examinations, Adorno's arguments are troublesome because the examiners assess qualities of performance rather than the qualities of the compositions. In addition, candidates that included improvisation would be viewed as artistically inferior to candidates that performed thoroughly-notated *Werktreue* without improvisation. Lastly, the clear demarcation between the

composition and the improvisation would in many cases be ambiguous to the examiner.

An opposing view that provides more potential for assessing improvisation within the contexts of graded music examinations is Sparshott's (1982) insistence that 'improvisation' should be valued through the aesthetic experience of performance rather than composition. Thus, while maintaining the focus on the product of improvisation, Sparshott opens the door to considering the active practices of improvisation to the extent that a listener must actively set aside flaws in a performance to appreciate the total work. Akin to Love's (2003) metaphor of appreciating an art object such as a vase in spite of (or because of) its slight imperfections, Sparshott states that when one listens to improvisation, one listens past the improviser's "fluffs, interruptions, squawks and all sorts of concomitants that we assume to be no part of the performance" (p. 255). This is because imperfections in an improvisation "are all part of the performance tied together in a single web of intention, a single aesthetic object, though an inconsistent one" (p. 255).

In regard to improvisation in graded music examinations, Sparshott's (1982) philosophical views are problematic for the examiners since they stress the listener's duty to listen past the imperfections of the exam candidate to assess the aesthetic experience of the performance as a whole. Being that examiners have standardised rubrics with categories based on qualities of the performance such as 'tone' and 'rhythm' (see 2.4.1), it is unclear from Sparshott how an examiner might listen past the rubric-based imperfections of the improviser and instead assess the overall performance in a manner consistent with their other assessments. The extent to which an examiner may ignore perceived mistakes in rubric categories such as 'tone' and 'rhythm' in favour of overall performance aesthetics is not found in the body research literature. Also unclear is whether improvisation is perceived by the examination boards as being integral to performance or as being a technical skill separate from performance.[15]

[15] Section 4.2 will present findings on how the ABRSM and TCL examinations assess improvisation differently (and sometimes inconsistently) depending on the specific test within the examination.

Improvisation as a practice

There has been increasing critical interest in music improvisation as an active culturally-situated *practice* (Williams, 2017; Azzara & Snell, 2016). Challenging the product-centred perception of improvisation, theories focusing on the practice of improvisation argue that improvisation does not gain meaning from analytical methods developed for interpreting notes on a page (Williams, 2017; Benson, 2003; Love, 2003). In their thorough review of literature on improvisation practices, Higgins and Mantie (2013) found three general practice-centred views of improvisation within the research: (a) as an aspect of a situated form of musical practice such as culture (i.e. Bailey's sitar player interview discussed in 2.3); (b) the phenomenological view of a way of being in the world, embodying qualities such as spontaneity, risk taking and play; and (c) as an integral component of a holistic perception of musicianship (p. 39). These three views largely sidestep the subject/object debate from the previous section concerning whether improvisation should be valued according to a performer's technique, completed work or individual elements (e.g. rhythm, pitch). By maintaining that improvisation is inseparable from the person, culture and contexts that created it these theorists open themselves to criticism for being overly subjective and lacking in clear evidence (Williams, 2017).

Theories focusing on improvisation practice challenge the current assessments of ABRSM and TCL examinations because they suggest that the phenomena of each improvisation (e.g. contexts, culture, physical movements, intentions) are linked to the improviser and should be brought to light before constructing theories to describe them (Savage, 2010; Benson, 2003; Love, 2003). Through this framework, it would not be accurate for an examiner to construct theories about a musician's improvisation and then bend the fixed rubric categories and descriptors to support those theories. Thus, a score awarded by a music examiner (e.g. 8/10) would lack meaning if determined via pre-conceived notions of what an eight-out-of-ten should sound like and subsequently justified using their standardised rubric (i.e. Stanley *et al.*, 2002; Mills, 1991).[16]

[16] Research on the practice of music examiners making a gut decision and then justifying the decision with a rubric will be discussed in section 2.4.3.

A clear example of a phenomenological view of the practice of improvisation comes from Sudnow's (1993) auto-ethnographic journey to becoming a jazz pianist. Sudnow recounts that as a novice he was preoccupied with technique, scales and arpeggios. He assessed his progress by the memorisation and recall of technique, scales and repertoire. As Sudnow gained experience, he came to perceive improvisation not through aesthetics based on technique and repertoire, but as an ongoing physical practice in which 'improviser', 'improvisation' and 'improvising' were inseparable. His attention matured from being preoccupied with items that could be found on an examiner's rubric such as scales and technique, to appreciating the embodied impulses of his hands, breathing and body movements as a structure to assess his improvisations.

A second view complimentary to Sudnow comes from Savage's (2010) thesis on the importance of "deep and methodical self-reflection" for an improviser (p. 9). Savage draws upon Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenological view of temporality to argue that holistic perceptions benefit performers by enabling them to make accurate ongoing assessments of their improvisation. Savage's key insight is that an individual's perceptions of improvisation are influenced by feelings and experiences that emerge over time, meaning that changes such as the events in one's life or the time of day can shape the perceptions of an improvisation held by the performer and an examiner.

From the point of view of the music examination boards, one could criticise these two examples for being unpractical in an examination setting. The bodily impulses described by Sudnow (1993) and the thoughts and feelings described by Savage (2010) are privileged information unavailable to music examiners working in the specified time allotment and framework of the ABRSM and TCL examinations (see 4.2.3). While this argument is based on the current framework of the graded examinations, it raises a question about the future flexibility of the assessments and whether more holistic/practice-centred assessments could be integrated. This question will be addressed in section 2.4, where it will emerge from the literature that while some theorists may favour holistic assessments because they more-accurately represent how listeners interpret music performance in real-world contexts (i.e. Stanley *et al.*, 2002; Mills, 1991), examination boards primarily draw upon

subject/object theories (i.e. Sparshott, 1982) because they are practical for marking music performances by unknown persons using standardised rubrics within strictly-limited timeframes.

There is a minor but relevant point that needs to be addressed before concluding. Within both the jazz and Western art music literature on improvisation, there is a lack of consistency and perhaps consideration between the uses of *music improvisation* and *musical improvisation*. This is an important distinction because it suggests an underlying perception of product or practice. Ethnomusicologist John Blacking (1995) uses the terms 'music' and 'musical' to make a useful distinction between the product and practice of music making. For Blacking, *musical* practices create *music* products. This raises questions about which terms the graded examination boards use because it brings light to their perception of improvisation. Being that there is no existing literature addressing this issue, this thesis will maintain an awareness of distinctions between practice-centred *musical* improvisation and product-centred *music* improvisation to investigate the perception of improvisation from the perspectives of the examination boards.[17]

Developing a working-definition of 'improvisation'

Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl (1998) provides a useful segue for the product/practice philosophical debate by pointing out that improvisation is not entirely mysterious as previously claimed (i.e. Hall, 2009; Bailey, 1993). What we do know about improvisation is that it has "points of departure" (Nettl, 1998, p. 12). Since improvisers have "something which they use to improvise on" (p. 15). From the research discussed in this chapter spanning from Moore (1992) to Azzara & Snell (2016), there is a unanimous notion that the points of departure in improvisation are based on "pre-existing guidelines of a musical tradition" (Moore, 1992, p. 64). Furthermore, having "something to improvise on" would only have meaning when improvisers incorporate a vocabulary common to a group of individuals (Nettl, 1998, p. 64; Williams, 2017; Watson, 2015).

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[17] This relates to the third research question (*What are the stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation in graded instrumental music examinations?*) and is further addressed with the research outcomes in section 4.3.1.

Echoes of the "something to improvise on" are also reported in Della Pietra & Campbell's (1995) ethnographic study of improvisation training. They concluded that improvisation derives from culturally-based models from which improvisation draws both its structure and its style. Examples of culturally-based models include genres, styles, histories and the traditions within the improvisers' communities; whether geographic or conceptual (i.e. Kenny, 2013). Cultural models can also include social groups (i.e. O'Neill and Green, 2001) such as family, gender and ethnicity. These models also include traditions of teaching and learning improvisation and are symbiotically joined with the type of setting in which the education is taking place and the people involved with creating the music (Niknafs, 2013).

Reflecting on Nettl's (1998) "points of departure", a question occurs as to whether there might also be metaphorical 'cultural way stations'. For example, after a notated melody is performed, the improviser might pass through different styles, musical phrases and cultural influences before revisiting the point of departure (i.e. returning to the melody). "Points of departure" (*ibid*) and the notion of 'cultural way stations' of improvisation can be conceptual (i.e. trying to capture the feeling of 1920's New Orleans) or physical (i.e. how one plays their instrument).

In the context of a music examination, a "point of departure" might include the notation of a melody and chord symbols. Another "point of departure" might be a genre, such as *baroque* or *jazz* or a style within a genre *(e.g. swing* and *bebop* are separate styles within the genre of *jazz*). All of these examples are culturally-situated reference points that are integral to the type of improvisation perceived by both student and examiner in formal graded music examinations. Using the "points of departure" and 'cultural way stations' metaphor, after departure, if an improviser visits the way stations of multiple cultures such as bebop, delta blues and French baroque within the same improvisation, how is this to be understood by an examiner? In this scenario, consideration of whether the assessments were based on Sparshott's (1982) aesthetics or holistic interpretations might yield very different results.

Drawing together these philosophies and the studies that support them, it becomes clear that definitions of improvisation need to consider the ways in which it is

practiced. The practice of improvisation occurs within the musical rules and boundaries of accepted styles in a way that embodies cultures. While the improviser's practice occurs within the accepted tenants of a locality, the improviser is also learning how to maintain their own individuality within a specific music(al) community.

When learning to improvise, students need to learn more than a set of technical skills like scales and arpeggios, they must also learn and adhere to the specific relevant cultural models relating to their music (i.e. Biasutti, 2017; Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995; Moore, 1992). Improvisers must also have something upon which they use to improvise, a 'point of departure' (Nettl, 1998) such as a basic melody. By distilling the literature, it emerged that *improvisation happens when practiced skills are spontaneously combined with cultural models and something upon which to improvise*.

It is currently unclear how the examination boards (the ABRSM and TCL) define improvisation or what performance/pedagogical practices of improvisation are expected. From this comes the first research question of this thesis: *How is improvisation defined and practiced in graded instrumental music examinations?*

2.4 'Assessment' in the Contexts of Formal Graded Music Examinations

Due to the lack of published studies on the assessment of improvisation within the graded music examinations, this section draws together multiple strands of music assessment and graded examination research to establish a foundation of relevant knowledge. Beginning by defining key terms, section 2.4 moves on to consider research on the use of marking rubrics in music examinations and the assessment criteria used with them. It emerges that the assessment criteria are standardised to help the examiners identify the skills and knowledge deemed most-important by the examination board administering the test, but the design of the assessment criteria and the training of the examiners are not always harmonious. As a result, complete objectivity cannot be achieved by examiners when examining non-improvised music

performance, thus making it doubtful that objective assessments could be achieved by examiners assessing 'improvisation'.

Key terms

While a small amount of critical literature has been written exploring graded music examinations (detailed in 2.1.1), this literature predominantly focused on the examinations and not the assessments. Regarding the difference between 'examination' and 'assessment', an 'assessment' involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of information in order to support a decision, whereas 'examination' (and 'test') are tools used to collect that information (Russell, 2011; Johnson *et al*., 2017). For example, a music exam candidate may take an improvisation test (e.g. ABRSM's Quick Study or TCL's Aural Test 2) as part of their examination (the collection of tests within the event) while the examiner makes an assessment by analysing and interpreting the candidate's performance and responses.

Graded music examinations are a variety of 'educational examinations' (Johnson, Constantinou & Crisp, 2017) that are developed, administered and marked by an organisation that is external to the candidates and their related learning institutions (2017, p. 700). Three salient characteristics of educational examinations are that (1) they provide certified recognition of candidates' learning, (2) function as a gateway to the next level of education, and (3) can be used by teachers and learning institutions (e.g. a county music service) to gauge local accountability (*ibid*). Thus, examiners' assessments have a larger impact on stakeholder accountability and future progressions in music.

Types of assessment

The research literature on graded music examinations unanimously argues that graded music assessments are 'summative' (e.g. Ross, 2009; Tye, 2004; Salaman, 1994). A *summative assessment* typically occurs as a separate activity from teaching and learning (i.e. not a part of the regular music lesson) at the end of a learning programme (Fautley, 2008, p. 1). The result is that a summation of achievement is demonstrated through competency or completion of a product (Harrison *et al*., 2013). The majority of the literature exploring assessments within graded music examinations has focused on the ABRSM's examinations (e.g. Ross, 2009; Tye, 2004; Salaman, 1994) while others have drawn comparisons between UK-based examinations and those established in other commonwealth countries (i.e. Mitchell, 2012; Dumlavwalla, 2011). A clear illustration of the consensus between these studies is provided by Ross (2009) in her article on the ABRSM examinations in South-East Asia:

> *Testing is wholly summative, a one-off event which decides the outcome of instruction. Communication between the candidate and the examiner, as well as the teacher and the examining authority is kept to a minimum, business-like and somewhat clinical.* (2009, p. 479)

While I accept the conclusions that the ABRSM (e.g. Ross, 2009) and TCL (e.g. Mitchell, 2012) examinations are summative, my own experiences with preparing students for graded music examinations have made me aware of something not mentioned in the previous literature, that the comments written by the examiners during assessments have the potential to be used as a 'formative' teaching-and-learning resource. This falls within what Fautley and Savage (2008) describe as 'the formative use of summative assessment'. By conceptualising *summative* assessment as a way of looking backwards (summarising) and *formative* assessment as a way of looking forward to help students take the next steps in learning, *the formative use of summative assessment* draws upon both of these types of assessment to benefit learning (i.e. Harrison *et al*., 2013; Fautley, 2008). Thus, if an examiner's comments are utilised by a music teacher to evaluate learning progress and provide feedback in order to motivate and make students aware of

what they must do to improve, formative use of the wholly summative assessments described by Ross (2011) and Salaman (1994) can occur.[18]

There is one other framework of assessment that has not been addressed in any of the graded music examination literature: *assessment for qualification and certification*. This is typically a part of a qualifications framework and is comprised of three key elements: pre-defined standards used to test the candidates (i.e. syllabus content), formal recognition of learning awarded by a qualified body (i.e. examiners and their board), and the awarding of a certificate that communicates a candidate's qualification-specific competencies and proceed vertically to a higher qualification (Dufaux, 2012). Although this framework has not previously been used to describe graded music examinations, it will later be explored for value since it excels at addressing high-stakes ventures with real-life consequences (Au, 2007) that can impact the student's future engagement with music, as well as the relationships between the teachers, students and parents and schools, which was shown in section 0 to be a significant issue in graded music examinations (i.e. Davidson & Scutt, 1999).[19] Thus when addressing the question, "how is improvisation assessed in graded music examinations?", an *assessment for qualification and certification* framework would best enable me to move beyond descriptions of whether or not the assessment was summative/formative to address the stages, validities of improvisation examinations as well as the impacts on different stakeholders.

2.4.1 Assessment criteria: rubrics & rationale.

In order to make reliable judgements, ABRSM and TCL examiners draw upon specific assessment criteria and marking *rubrics* provided by their examination board. A music assessment rubric is a set of scoring criteria used to determine a

[18] This question will be settled in section 4.2 when it emerges through my case study data that the formative use of the examiner's comments was typically not possible because the language on the assessment rubrics (particularly those of ABRSM) could be unclear and/or the language used by the examiner did not match the language used within the rubric.
[19] This framework will be drawn upon in section 0 when addressing the outcomes of the second research question which asks, "How is improvisation assessed in graded music examinations?"

candidate's performance on assigned tasks (Wesolowski, 2012, p. 37). Rubrics divide specific tasks (e.g. performance) into constituent parts (e.g. tone, phrasing) and present descriptors within the levels of each part (e.g. consistent tone, less-consistent tone). The descriptors can have two functions, one assists the examiners to determine the amount of marks to award (Stanley *et al*., 2002), the other informs the candidate of their results in the categories of the exam and what they must improve upon for future exams (Wesolowski, 2012).

There are two general types of rubrics, holistic and analytic (*ibid*). Holistic rubrics provide a single score based on an overall assessment, are generally quick to use and allow the examiner to award a subjective cumulative score (Mills, 1991) but often fail to provide detailed information (Stanley *et al*., 2002). In the context of improvisation, holistic rubrics would allow examiners to listen to the whole improvisation and award an overall mark rather than award multiple marks for specific criteria (i.e. rubric categories such as 'rhythm'). Analytic rubrics contain multiple dimensions of evaluative criteria (e.g. tone, pitch, rhythm), each containing multiple descriptors such as 'excellent', 'good' or 'poor'. While it is known that analytic rubrics are generally more time-consuming to complete than holistic rubrics, they have the advantage of providing a wider range of specific feedback because they contain more assessment criteria (Wesolowski, 2012), exactly which types of rubric are being used by examiners to assess improvisation is currently not in the literature.[20]

Assessment criteria rationale

There are two general arguments for the goals of creating assessment criteria: to measure skills and knowledge deemed important for the students to know (i.e. Lindemann, 2003) and as an aid to examiners for making the most-objective assessments possible. The first view, championed by the National Association for Music Education (see Lindemann, 2003), is that assessments of music performance must be standardised with the goal of measuring the skills and knowledge deemed most important for the students to learn. Its basis is that the performance

[20] This will be addressed in section 0 where it is argued that analytic rubrics are the standard for the performance section of ABRSM and TCL exams, but some of their short aural tests draw upon holistic rubrics.

assessments need to be valid, reliable and authentic so every examination candidate should be given the same questions that interrogate knowledge prioritised by the examination board. While this emphasises the standardisation of the examinations, it minimises the role of the examiners in determining the outcomes.

An opposing rationale for creating assessment criteria is that it aids examiners in achieving a more-objective assessment. An influential example of this argument comes from Johnson (1997) whose study of problems with music assessment criteria in conservatoires identified three distinct benefits for an examiner. Assessment criteria: (1) aids an examiner in going beyond the minimum standards required of the students, (2) aids the examiner in identifying innovative and idiosyncratic work within all student performances, (3) helps to distinguish between artistic and technical achievements.

Johnson (1997) conceded that assessment criteria could not guarantee complete objectivity within assessments of music performance and therefore the effectiveness of the assessment process was contingent on the methods of assessment used by the examiners. Johnson's findings that objectivity could not be achieved when examining music performance highlight the problems with trying to achieve valid, reliable and authentic assessments in music examinations by different examiners on a global scale (i.e. Lindemann, 2003, p. xii). Regarding the assessment of improvisation, this suggests that the contents of a marking rubric can help an examiner identify specific standards and achievements, however this is questionable in situations when the marking rubrics for improvisation and non-improvisation are the same, such as TCL's classical and jazz performance rubric (addressed in 4.2.2.1).

The topics of improvisation assessment criteria (e.g. objectivity, validity) in graded music examinations have not yet been addressed in the literature. From the literature, I infer that the extra challenges posed by assessing improvisation (i.e. individuality, spontaneity, originality) make it doubtful that more-objective assessments could be achieved by examiners drawing from standardised rubric criteria. Moreover, any improvisation-specific criteria require an examiner qualified to interpret both the rubrics and the improvisation. For example, an examiner not

trained in jazz might not make valid assessments of improvisation related to a jazz syllabus. This thesis will therefore address the improvisation-specific marking criteria as well as the qualifications of the examiners to make the assessments (see 4.2.3).

2.4.2 Processes of evaluation.

Whereas the last section explored the written materials that examiners could draw upon when making assessments of improvisation, this section explores the goals and benefits of different types of evaluation processes. Connecting to the discussion of holistic and subject/object interpretation of improvisation and the 'holistic' and 'analytic' (criteria-based) rubric types, this section critically compares their corresponding processes of evaluation: (1) *holistic assessments* that consider an overall performance and award an overall mark (e.g. Mills, 1991) and (2) *criterion-based assessments* that help examiners to focus on relevant aspects of the performances (e.g. Stanley *et al.*, 2002). It emerges that in all of these processes of evaluation, examiners draw upon gut reactions and use marking criteria and prior experiences to justify their initial reactions. Tensions arise with improvisation when the examiners lack the experience to make informed initial reactions or when the marking criteria do not encompass an examiner's reactions, thus limiting their agency (Dumlavwalla, 2011) to award what they believed to be an appropriate mark.

The literature debate between holistic and criteria-based assessment in graded music examinations began with Mills' (1991) study of how music performance could be best evaluated within UK GCSE examinations. In her experiment, examiners making 'holistic' assessments considered the whole performance and assigned a single cumulative mark whereas examiners evaluating performances through 'segmented' (criteria-based) assessment used an analytic rubric to assign marks for separate skills and aspects of interpretation that were combined into a final score. Mills' experiment presented videos of student instrumental performances (Grade 8 standard) to trainee teachers who assessed performances using either the ABRSM rubric (i.e. segmented assessment) or a list of diametric constructs based on

qualities that the examiners observed from watching an initial set of performances.[21] Mills concluded that using holistic assessment allowed the examiners to consider the whole performance in a more-musical way (p. 173), whereas segmented assessment obliged examiners to contend with an equation of skills and interpretation markings that had the effect of rendering examiners less articulate than when assessing holistically. Mills' (1991) argument for holistic assessment appears to be more suited to capturing the spontaneous and unexpected qualities of improvisation than criteria-based, however the examination boards currently use criteria-based assessments. Exactly why is not found in the literature.[22]

Relating to the issues of reliability, validity and authenticity raised recently in the discussion of assessment criteria (e.g. Lindemann, 2003; Johnson, 1997), Mills (1991) argued that holistic assessment had advantages of ecological validity, "It is more musically credible, in the sense that it is more like assessment made of musical performance in the real world. In addition, it can be more reliable…" (p. 179). While Mills' argument was that holistic assessment was more like real-world assessments, she did not engage with the constraints of real-world music examinations. It was not clear in this study if the mock examiners had to work under the time constraints as real ABRSM and TCL examiners. Nor did the participant examiners have to apply the same assessment criteria to musicians in different countries, cultures or music genres as real ABRSM and TCL examiners. One could argue that music examinations have been a common part of UK music pedagogy for over a century and that they now represent a legitimate real-world performance context. This raises a question about whether improvisation in graded music examinations is perceived as authentic real-world contexts or if improvisation in the exams is instead nested within the contexts of graded music examinations.

This argument highlights the space between musically-authentic contexts and the contexts of graded music examinations. While holistic assessment was argued to be

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[21] Rubric examples listed by Mills (1991; p. 178) included "The performer MADE SENSE/DID NOT MAKE SENSE of the piece as a whole" and "The performers technical problems were HARDLY NOTICEABLE/DISTRACTING". These categories will be discussed further in Chapter 4.2 because they correspond to those used by ABRSM in their Quick Study and Aural Test B.

[22] This will be addressed in section 0 as it relates to how ABRSM and TCL assess improvisation.

more 'musically credible' having greater authenticity and validity, it was doubtful that the reliability of the assessments would be greater. From Mills' research, I inferred that the needs for the ABRSM and TCL to examine candidates globally in short timeframes within fixed schedules places an emphasis on the reliability associated with segmented (criteria-based) assessment rather than the authenticity associated Mills (1991) associates with holistic assessment.

A more nuanced view of the holistic vs segmented debate is well-represented by Stanley, Booker and Gilbert's (2002) study of examiners' perceptions of criteria for assessing music performance. Following up directly on Mills (1991), the researchers' interviews with fifteen music conservatoire staff revealed the positive and negative perceptions of both holistic and criteria-based ('segmented') assessment of music performance (see Table 2).

Table 2 Holistic vs criteria-based assessment.[23]

	Positive	Negative
Holistic assessment	• Acknowledges the subjectivity of the assessment. • Positions 'the whole' as greater than the sum of its parts. • Greater ecological validity.	• Makes it more challenging to concentrate and comment on specifics. • Reliability is questionable because of biases associated with subjectivity.
Criteria-based (segmented) assessment	• Criteria helps examiners concentrate on salient aspects of the music; this is especially useful for an inconsistent performance. • Helps provide specific feedback to candidates. • Greater reliability.	• Criteria can be tedious. The criteria may not cover all aspects of the performance. • Ticking boxes detracts from critical listening.

Table 2 reveals differences in the debate between subjectivity vs objectivity, validity vs reliability, the whole vs the parts, and the ability to provide useful feedback for the candidates. Holistic assessments were viewed positively for their real-world

[23] All data in this table was extracted from Stanley, Booker and Gilbert (2002, p. 46-54).

(ecologically-valid) subjectivity. Contrasting with this, criteria-based assessments were viewed positively for their reliability, which was grounded in the objectivity of the evaluation. There were also negative views of both. Holistic assessment was perceived negatively by the participants because it made it more challenging to leave comments on the specifics of the performance. In addition, the authors argued that the dependency on subjective evaluation was likely to be negatively impacted by subjective-marking biases. By contrast, criteria-based assessments were viewed negatively because the box-ticking distracted from critical listening. In addition, the criteria might not cover all aspects of a performance; an issue that is highly-relevant to the recent inclusion of improvisation within the graded assessments (Stanley *et al.* 2002).[24]

In addition to making an evaluation, Table 2 also reveals that the two types of assessment can influence an examiner's ability to leave feedback. Mills (1991) found that segmented (criteria-based) assessment resulted in examiners feeling "less articulate" (1991, p. 173), whereas Stanley *et al.* (2002) found that criteria-based assessment helped examiners provide feedback by providing them with specific criteria upon which they could comment. Reconciling these views, I would speculate that having very specific marking criteria can give the examiner specific talking points, which would be particularly useful in the case of a poor or inconsistent performance. Using holistic marking enables the examiner to make comments beyond the specific criteria and address the sum/whole rather than the individual parts. Holistic evaluations (Savage, 2010; Benson, 2003; Love, 2003) would be particularly useful in higher-level performances such as those examined by Mills (1991) and her participants (they assessed grade 8+ GCSE performances) in cases where there is little to say about the individual parts (e.g. rhythm, tone) because they are excellent.

[24] This issue will be further discussed in Chapter 4.2 when it emerges that improvisation is often not clearly distinguished from non-improvisation (i.e. playing a notated melody) within the jazz performance marking rubrics; particularly those of the ABRSM.

The study by Stanley *et al*. (2002) has an additional finding relevant to this thesis. The authors noted that their participants[25] drew upon a three-fold process when evaluating music performances: *gut reaction*, *justification* and *verification*. First, examiners arrived at a gut reaction to the performance (the researchers termed this a 'global assessment'). After the initial reaction, examiners sought justification by identifying specific characteristics within the performance. Lastly, examiners made sure that they were giving adequate consideration to all aspects of the performance by contemplating any specific assessment criteria. These findings suggest that examiners may begin assessments (the 'global assessment') with more-holistic evaluations (e.g. the performer's technical problems were *hardly noticeable/ distracting*) and then justify their assessments with more-specific criteria-based evaluations (e.g. *technique*, *phrasing*).

While the studies of Mills (1991) and Stanley *et al*. (2002) made useful interrogations of holistic and criteria-based assessments, neither was conducted with examiners who were specifically-trained by a graded examination board. The participants of both studies were doing the best that they could with varying amounts of musical and professional experience, but without specific or codifying training from an examination board. Neither study adequately considered the practicalities of the tight time frame under which graded examiners must operate, nor did they consider how the assessment of improvisation might be affected by choices between holistic assessment or criterion-based (segmented) assessments.

2.4.3 Examiners: decision making and training.

Exploring how examiners were trained within a Canadian music examination board, Dumlavwalla's (2011) PhD dissertation notes a difference between two types of preparation connected to examiner training: *indirect* preparation and *direct* preparation. Indirect preparations referred to all that the examiner brought into the room when they first arrived for official training such as professional experiences and

[25] It should be noted that these examiners had not been trained by a graded examination board, a process that could have affected this three-stage assessment process (see 2.4.3).

musical background.[26] Direct preparation referred to how the examiners were trained by the examination boards to use specific criteria to mark consistently across all candidates, genres and instruments. The reliability of the evaluations was dependent on the examiners using direct preparation rather than the indirect, meaning that some experience and expertise must be bracketed away in order to make consistent evaluations.

Dumlavwalla's dissertation complements the findings by Mills (1991) and Stanley *et al*. (2002) by revealing an association between an examiner's own experiences in connection to 'holistic assessment', and an examiner's specific assessment training in connection to 'segmented/criteria-based assessment'. All of the examiners that Dumlavwalla (2011) observed and interviewed were found to have both direct and indirect preparations with them at all times and needed to learn to mediate between the two to produce consistent results. This develops and provides support for a supposition by Stanley *et al*. (2002) that examiners can benefit from both holistic and criteria-based evaluations. Holistic assessment and criteria-based assessment are thus not diametric 'either/or' 'better-or-worse' rivals but instead form a complex integrated relationship that examiners must learn to successfully mediate over time.

While Dumlavwalla thoroughly explored graded examiner training in regard to classical piano examinations, she did not discuss improvisation. Since the ABRSM and TCL examiners' perceptions of improvisation and improvisation-inclusive genres such as jazz are currently unaccounted for in the literature, the question arises: *How is improvisation being assessed in graded instrumental music examinations?*

[26] While Dumlavwalla (2011) did not explicitly discuss 'culture', I inferred from her thesis that she and the other examiners came from similar music learning cultures and had the privilege of being able to afford regular music lessons in preparation for the graded examinations.

2.5 Chapter Summary and Main Research Questions

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature on the assessment of improvisation in graded music examinations:

Section 2.1 set the stage of the thesis by presenting the history and critical literature of the two dominant UK-based music examination boards, the ABRSM and TCL. Both examination boards originated as examining branches of London music conservatories during a Victorian era when official professional qualifications were increasing being established and required (i.e. Wright, 2013), as well as time of colonialism when musical values and perceptions of legitimacy where being exported globally (e.g. Johnson-Hill, 2015). The examination boards competed for prestige and professional recognition, while simultaneously generating extra income for their associated conservatoire faculty.

While the ABRSM and TCL are now officially independent from their parent conservatories (although still sharing names and keeping the conservatoire heads on their boards of directors), some recent literature focusing on graded music examinations (see 2.1.1) has convincingly argued that traces of colonial culture still exists and manifests when UK examination repertoire and its emphasis on European classical music/values supersedes the musical cultures and values of Commonwealth countries like Canada (i.e. Dumlavwalla; 2011), Malaysia (Kok, 2011; Ross, 2009; Tye, 2004) and South Africa (Johnson-Hill, 2015). None of the research literature mentioned improvisation but it did suggest that like other qualities of music, improvisation can be perceived differently in different cultures and contexts (i.e. value, prestige, correctness, rationale for improvising).

Section 2.2 identified the five key stakeholders of this research and argued that they could all have different perceptions of improvisation and assessment within graded music examinations. To organise the stakeholders, I identified two groups: *examination boards stakeholders* (examiners & syllabus authors) and *teaching-and-learning stakeholders* (students, their teachers and some parents). By examining literature that investigated the ways in which these stakeholders constructed their perceptions of music performance (i.e. Creech, 2009; Davidson & Scutt, 1999), it

emerged that there were strong culturally-based relationships[27] developed through shared practices (i.e. pedagogical, institutional) based on underlying values resulting in inevitable influence (i.e. Johnson *et al*. 2017) on how improvisation was perceived, practiced and assessed by each stakeholder.

Section 2.3 presented leading interpretations of 'improvisation' in Western music with emphasis on the subject/object aesthetics of improvisation in which improvisation (the object) is presented to the listener (the subject). The wide spectrum of perceptions of improvisation made a single definition of 'improvisation' too broad to be useful in this thesis. To overcome this, salient literature including Nettl's (1998) concept of 'points of departure' and Blacking's (1995) separation of 'music' and 'musical', were distilled thereby enabling me to begin researching the first research question: *how is improvisation defined and practiced in graded music examinations?*

Section 2.4 defined 'assessment' and 'examination' in the context of graded music examinations. While the research literature consistently referred to graded examinations as exclusively using summative assessments (i.e. Ross, 2009; Tye, 2004; Salaman, 1994), I argued that there was the potential for assessments to be used formatively (i.e. Fautley, 2008, Davidson & Scutt, 1999) if the examiner comment sheets were incorporated into the pedagogical practice. Going beyond this, I theorised that improvisation in graded music examinations should be viewed in the framework of *assessment for qualification and certification*, which takes to account the pre-defined standards (syllabuses), assessment authorities (examiners, boards) and certifications (the meanings conveyed by a diploma).

The summative assessments of instrumental music were divided into two types by Mills (1991, p. 173): 'holistic' and 'segmented'. 'Holistic' assessments assigned cumulative marks based on the whole performance whereas 'segmented' assessments tallied marks assigned for separate skills. Mills' study made a strong case that holistic assessment could be more musically 'authentic' than segmented

[27] Culturally-based practices will largely shape the socio-cultural framework of this thesis presented in methodology section 3.1.1.

assessment. However, the reliability of holistic assessment was less than segmented assessment; a key issue when providing examinations across the world in multiple instruments and music genres.

In both holistic and segmented assessment, examiners engaged in a three-step process (Stanley *et al*., 2002) beginning with a 'global assessment' (i.e. a gut reaction), followed by examiners justifying their global assessments by identifying specific characteristics of the performance. Lastly, examiners contemplated specific assessment criteria to be sure that they were giving adequate consideration to all aspects of the performance. A comparison of their findings with the key studies of Mills (1991), Johnson (1997) and Dumlavwalla (2011) indicated that examiners begin assessments holistically (i.e. 'globally') and then narrowed down to more-specific criterion-based, 'segmented' decisions.

Lastly, the research examined how examiners used *indirect* (professional experiences and tastes) and *direct* experiences (training from their examination board) for making assessments (Dumlavwalla, 2011). Graded music examiners were supposed to use their direct training (e.g. using their marking rubrics) while simultaneously bracketing away their indirect training in order to make consistent assessments across multiple music genres and instruments. Absent from the literature were details about how graded examiners were trained to assess improvisation and how they carried out those assessments in practice.

Research questions

From the reviewed section above, I formulated two main research questions: (RQ2) How is improvisation being assessed in graded instrumental music examinations? and (RQ3) What are the stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation in graded instrumental music examinations?

While each graded instrumental music syllabus published by the ABRSM and TCL clearly stated specific repertoire, technical and aural requirements for the examination, specifications concerning improvisation are predominantly minimal, vague or non-existent. The lack of clarity and cohesion regarding improvisation-related definitions, practices and assessment criteria provide for differences in

perceptions among the key stakeholders. The disparity of definitions, practices and perceptions regarding the assessment of improvisation within the music syllabuses are not consonant with the examination board ethos to 'provide goals', 'support progression' and 'lay good foundations for music making' (ABRSM, 2015, p. 2) while 'offering precise and specific feedback to inform continued learning'.[28]

Emerging from the review were three key research questions of this thesis:

Table 3 The three main research questions.

Main Research Questions of this Thesis	Supporting literature
RQ 1: ***How is improvisation defined and practiced in graded instrumental music examinations?*** (arose 2.3, addressed in 4.1)	Alperson, 2014; Savage, 2010; Love, 2003; Benson 2003; Sparshott, 1982
RQ 2: How is improvisation being assessed in graded instrumental music examinations? (arose in 2.4, addressed in 4.2)	Dumlavwalla, 2011; Ross, 2009; Stanley, Booker and Gilbert, 2002; Johnson, 1997; Mills, 1991
RQ 3: ***What are the stakeholders' (student, teacher, parent, examiner and syllabus author) perceptions of improvisation in graded instrumental music examinations?*** (arose in 2.2. & 2.3, addressed in 4.3)	Landgraf, 2011; Davidson & Scutt, 1999; Love, 2003; Alperson, 2014

[28] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/site/?id=1046 2 Sept 2017

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

The literature review in the previous chapter explored the key terms and concepts of 'music improvisation' and 'assessment' within the contexts of the 'graded music examination.' A review of aesthetic and holistic philosophies of 'music improvisation' (see 2.3.1) led to a conclusion that improvisation happens when *practiced skills are spontaneously combined with cultural models and* something upon which to improvise (see 2.3.2).

I then traced the 'formal graded music examinations' provided by the UK's largest examination boards, the ABRSM and TCL, from their origins as colonial-era authorities of classical music to their current statuses as world-spanning corporations and authorities of instrumental music with influential roles in instrumental music education (2.1). Being that their histories were deeply rooted in classical music without options for assessing improvisation, it was unclear how they perceived the practices of improvisation and its roles within the classical and jazz genre curricula.

Exploring the assessments, I found that the research literature unanimously situates graded examinations as being *summative* (2.4) since the examiners only considered what they heard during the examination. Going beyond the literature, I suggested that the 'summative' label was superficial since the examiners' feedback could be used *formatively*. Moreover, the overarching preparation and consequences of a graded music examination could be more accurately described with the assessment framework of *assessment for qualification and certification*. This framework will shape my future arguments because it focuses attention on three areas, the pre-defined standards (syllabuses and their authors), the competence of the awarding body (examiners), and the meanings conveyed by the certification (what the diploma communicates about candidates' improvisation skills).

Using the literature to identify the key stakeholders of this research, I distinguished five key stakeholders and placed them into two groups: those from an examination board (*examiners* and *syllabus authors*) (2.2.1) and those from the 'triads' of instrumental music lessons (*students*, *teachers* and *parents*). From the gaps in the

literature, I identified three key research questions (see Table 3) that asked how improvisation is (1) defined and practiced, (2) assessed and (3) perceived within graded music examinations. Having identified the main research questions and the stakeholders, I developed a research design that addressed the research questions from the perspectives of all of the stakeholders (see Table 4). In general, the document analyses addressed the perspectives of the exam boards. The observations of music lessons (the case study) addressed the perspectives of the teaching-and-learning triads. Interviews were used to elicit additional information from all of the stakeholders.

Table 4 The research questions and the corresponding research methods.

Research Questions	Document Analysis		Observations		Interviews	
	Boards	T&L	Boards	T&L	Boards	T&L
1) *How is improvisation defined and practiced…?*	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
2) *How is improvisation being assessed…?*	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
3) *What are the stakeholders' perceptions…?*	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓

Examination board stakeholders ("Boards") are indicated with blue.
Teaching-and-learning stakeholders ("T&L") are indicated with orange.

Table 4 provides a summary of how the research questions are interrogated by multiple methods. Listed from left to right are the research questions, corresponding methods and the stakeholders' perspectives that they illuminate. For example, the tick marks to the right of Research Question 1, "How is improvisation defined and practiced…", reveal that the question is interrogated by three methods: 1) *document analysis* for the examination boards' perspectives, 2) *observations* to elicit the reality of how exams are being interpreted in the teaching-and-learning environments and 3) *interviews* that allow for additional reflection and representation from all of the stakeholders.

This chapter will serve to establish the methodology I adopted in producing a qualitative multi-case study focusing on improvisation within instrumental examinations. The design will combine a document analysis (3.3.1) of the classical and jazz syllabuses of the two largest examination boards, the ABRSM and TCL, with observations and interviews (3.3.2) of three teaching-and-learning triads as they prepare for an examination with improvisation. The document analysis addresses how the examination boards define, assess and perceive improvisation whereas the observations and interviews (3.3.2) of music lessons over two months reveals how teachers, students and parents define, assess and perceive improvisation within their practice. In addition, interviews with syllabus authors from both examination boards are scheduled to illuminate how the perceptions and definitions of improvisation of the syllabus authors shape or conflict with improvisation practices within the observed teaching-and-learning practices. Ethical considerations are integrated with the methodology during each step of the data collection and analysis and implications are discussed.

3.1 Research Design & Theories

While the multi-case study and analysis of the ABRSM and TCL improvisation-related documents are presented in separate sections of this chapter, it was clear to me that the actual stages of data collection and analysis would overlap. To avoid conflicts, I first created a *research design* that organised the fieldwork and desk-based analyses into workable phases (see Figure 2):

Figure 2 Research design phases

1. **Literature review**: Provided in Chapter 2, this spotlighted the *knowns* and remaining *unknowns* that formed the basis of the main research questions;

2. **Situate ideas in theory**: Having synthesised the knowns and unknowns into three main research questions (2.5), the next phase was to situate them within a theoretical framework. After a review of related literature, socio-cultural theory was selected (see 3.1.1) for best investigating the questions in congruence with salient case study literature (Appendix A);

3. **Pilot Study**: I tested and determined the methodology's feasibility and likelihood of success by designing and carrying-out a small-scale pilot study. While I did not include the original pilot as a stand-alone chapter, I have included lessons learned from the pilot where relevant;[29]

4. **Instrument design and data collection**: Having refined my methods according to findings from my Pilot Study, I collected the data necessary for answering my research questions through document analysis (see 3.3.1) and case study-related observations and interviews (3.3.2);

5. **Testing & Outcomes**: Data collected in the prior stage was analysed and presented in context with the main research questions in Chapter Four. Arguments built upon the literature review were revisited to develop new knowledge.

6. **Confirmation and Dissemination**: The outcomes from Chapter Four (Chapter Four) were presented to the research participants for confirmation and reflection.

The overall structure was influenced by Gorard's (2013) argument that a research design should strengthen the overall validity by convincing sceptical readers that the important decisions and conclusions are as safe as possible (p. 4). In response to Gorard's validity argument, the final phase of the design included a step for the findings to be presented to the research participants for their verification and/or clarification. In addition to increasing validity, presenting the findings to the participants meets the high ethical standards (see 3.3.2.5) that I maintained throughout this thesis.

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[29] The pilot study was conducted between February-May 2015. Conclusions and recommendations for refinements were included in my first year Registration Report submitted to the Faculty of Education in July 2015.

3.1.1 Socio-cultural framework.

The methodology of my research draws on Vygotsky's (1978) theories as developed by Dobson (2012) and Littleton & Mercer (2010) that to understand how individuals define, practice and perceive improvisation in graded music examinations the stakeholders must be tracked through change, (i.e. their social interaction), over time, and in their natural environments. Through this framework, instrumental music lessons are viewed as a dialogic interactive process between students and teachers working within settings that reflect the values and social practices of cultural institutions.

My research assumes that when an examination board makes the decision to include improvisation in a syllabus, an educational dialogue between examination boards, instrumental music teachers, students, parents and examiners is put into motion. Each party has their own social and cultural understandings of improvisation that "resourced the negotiation of their emergent identity" (Miell and Littleton, 2008, p. 41) and must in some way jointly construct shared understandings. A 'socio-cultural' framework (*ibid*) is therefore preferred for answering the research questions because it allows me to study the stakeholders' active construction (through tools and dialogue) of improvisation.

Throughout the following section, I will further detail the epistemological (theory of knowledge) and ontological (interpretation of meaning) standpoints of this research. Regarding the epistemological framework, I will contend that knowledge is contextual and shared through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978) and that all data gathered to investigate the research questions should reflect this. Regarding the ontological framework, I will argue that individuals construct meaning through interactions with their cultural environments, meaning that interpretations of real-world evidence (e.g. observations of music lessons) is an 'ontological process' related to broader social and cultural issues that influence any claims of truth (Grbich, 2013, p. 3).

3.1.1.1 epistemology: the nature of knowledge in music improvisation.

Epistemological standpoints in music research (the assumptions regarding how music-related knowledge is constructed) have ranged across many different fields including as *phenomenological experience* (i.e. Sudnow, 1993), *ritual* (i.e. Baily, 1993; Blacking, 1995), *musical practice* (i.e. Finnegan, 2007) and *social/linguistic contexts* (i.e. Monson, 1996; Berliner, 1994). Due to the paucity of research literature focusing on theories of knowledge within graded music examinations, I will draw upon comparable studies of instrumental music, particularly Marín *et al.*'s (2014) study of woodwind students' (ages 8-18) changing conceptions of knowledge and Miell and Littleton's (2008) study of teens negotiating knowledge and identity through weekly band rehearsals.

Defining epistemology as "what people think about the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired" Marín, Pérez-Echeverría & Scheuer (2014, p 248) demonstrated that music students of different ages and abilities have different conceptions of 'musical knowledge'. Their research found that elementary[30] students' conceptions of music are often that of a linear relationship between conditions and outcomes, meaning that if certain conditions were met (e.g. knowing the location of notes on an instrument) then learning would occur (e.g. being able to play a G major scale). In contrast, more-advanced students did not view knowledge as increasing linearly between conditions and outcomes. The authors concluded that increasingly complex learning situations led to more-complex conceptions of music knowledge, such as a search for meanings not explicitly notated in a score.

I was influenced by Miell and Littleton's (2008) use of socio-cultural theory and emphasis of the impact of 'cultural tools' (Vygotsky, 1978) in tandem with social interaction in the construction of knowledge. From this perspective, cultural tools such as a graded music syllabus or music instrument graded can help develop a music student's knowledge. In addition, social tools such as collaboration that enables music students to develop a shared knowledge with other stakeholders.

[30] In this study, 'elementary' referred to age 8+ with less than a few years of lessons. 'Advanced' students were teens with several years of formal woodwind lessons.

Combining these theories with the non-linear development of music knowledge demonstrated by Marín *et al*. (2014) this thesis goes forward with the belief that the acquisition of knowledge is not conceived as the reproduction of a model, but rather "the selection, organisation and integration of information from different sources" (Marín *et al.*, 2014, p. 483).

3.1.1.2 ontology: 'what it is to know' in improvisation

While a common definition of 'ontology' is that it is the study of what it means to know about a social reality (i.e. Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998), this is inadequate for following the socio-culturally epistemological framework developed in the last section. Having concluded that 'knowing' is integral to social communication and culture (3.1.1.1), it follows that the ontological question of this research should move beyond 'what it is to know' to the more socially and contextually-encompassing question of 'what does it mean to be' (i.e. Packer and Goicoechea, 2000). For example, *what it means to be* an examiner calmly listening to a candidate engaging with improvisation is very different from what it means to be a nervous candidate stepping into an unfamiliar room with a stranger to take a Grade 1 Jazz Saxophone exam without a clear understanding of how the examiner will perceive or assess the improvisations.

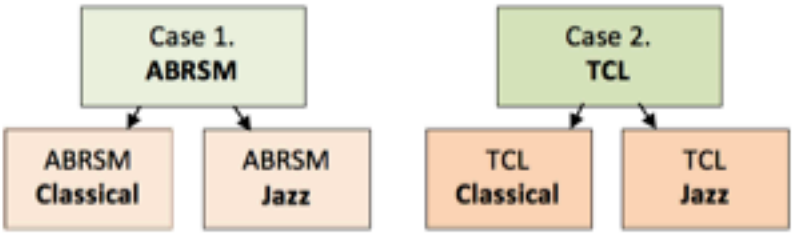
Like the socio-cultural epistemological framework outlined in the last section, the ontology of this thesis was largely drawn from Miell & Littleton's (2008) use of the theories of Vygotsky (1978) to explore the inter-relationships between human activity and social and cultural contexts. These theories infer that there is not a single fixed view of reality, but that music improvisation takes place in specific cultural contexts, is mediated by language and music symbol systems and can be best understood when investigated as practiced in natural settings. Vygotsky's approaches to learning and development derived from the belief that 'human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can be best understood when investigated in their historical development' (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191).

Integral to the socio-cultural framework are Vygotsky's (1978) theories that the development of knowledge occurs through social interaction over time through the use of physical/cultural tools. Using these three key principles to address the ontological question of 'what it means to be', it could be said that 'what it means to be' is socially and culturally developed and mediated (e.g. jazz or classically-based social and pedagogical practices). 'What it means to be' is understood through observation of the historical/temporal evolution of socially-situated activities (e.g. ongoing music lessons). 'What it means to be' involves social and cultural tools that are used to mediate the inter-relationships of higher mental functioning. 'Cultural tools' may be physical objects (e.g. a musical instrument) and/or psychological resources for thinking and acting which are constituted by language (e.g. collaboration).

These three theories have become the primary groundwork for developing socio-culturally guided research of human activity (Dobson, 2012) and thus form a basis for enabling the researcher to understand 'what it means to be' in the contexts of improvisation and assessment in graded music examinations. Thus, the ontological positioning which reflects the thesis claims to view interpretations of improvisation and being a musician that improvises as situated in socially and culturally developed/mediated practices rooted in historical traditions.

3.2 The Case Study

In order to address the research questions from the perspectives of the teaching-and-learning stakeholders, I designed a case study that observed exam candidates preparing for a graded music examination in their regular weekly lessons. The design focused on two leading examination boards (see 3.2.1.1) that offer improvisation options and used them as the two cases: *ABRSM* and *TCL*. To further refine the investigation, I explored the two most-popular genres within each case: *Classical* & *Jazz*. The case study design is shown in the following diagram:



Based on a review of related case studies (see Appendix A), I concluded that observations and interviews with triads of instrumental music teachers, students and parents while they prepared for a graded music examination (i.e. Davidson & Scutt, 1999) would be the most effective way to shed light on the teaching-and-learning stakeholders *defined*, *practiced*, *assessed* and *perceived* improvisation. This design also allowed me to observe how examination board documents such as syllabuses, software and music backing tracks were used in the pedagogical practices and the resulting tensions when the exam board documents did not align with the music teachers' perceptions and practices of improvisation.

3.2.1 Defining the cases.

It could be argued that the term 'case study' has shifted over the last few decades from methods to a methodology, from being "an umbrella term for a family of research methods having in common the decisions to focus on enquiry around an instance" (Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis, 1980, p. 48) to the majority of recent views

as part of the methodology where it investigates the phenomena of interest through 'managing' (Taber, 2013), 'strategising' (Robson, 2002) and 'informing' (Stake, 2009; Yin, 2014) the methods of data collection.

Case studies are primarily determined by the case(s) within them (Stake, 2006, p. 2), meaning it is crucial to clearly define each case before designing the case study methodology. Most theorists in this field have provided lists of case-related phenomena such as 'a noun, a thing, an entity' (Stake, 2006, p. 1) to guide potential researchers. A notable point comes from Robson (2002), who argues that these lists have become "excess baggage" and offers a more flexible definition of a 'case': "whatever we are interested in" (Robson, 2002, p. 177).

Having considered definitions by other leading theorists (Yin, 2014; Tabor, 2013; Stake, 2009), I made the decision to draw chiefly from Robinson's (2002) definition of case study since it minimised the lists of attributes and further clarified the active role of the researcher in data collection:

> *Case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence.* (Robson, 2002, p. 178)

This thesis goes forward with the understanding that the 'cases' are the phenomena of interest (improvisation in the ABRSM and TCL examinations) and the 'case study' is the overarching empirical investigation of improvisation in graded music examinations within the real-life contexts of instrumental music lessons and examination board offices. The case study draws upon and manages multiple methods for collecting and analysing evidence including document analysis (3.3.1), observations and interviews (3.3.2) with the goal of addressing the main research questions. The research outcomes are intended to be 'fuzzy' (Bassey, 1999) indicators of what is possible, likely, or unlikely to be found in similar situations occurring elsewhere (p. 12) rather than as 'theoretically generalisable' (Yin, 2014) or as degrees of bigger-to-smaller generalisability (Stake, 2006).

Rationale prompting the case study

A case study suits my research goals because it best enables me to simultaneously manage investigations into the examination board stakeholders, their published curricula and the teaching-and-learning stakeholders that use the graded music examinations as part of their pedagogical practices. The initial decision to use a case study was prompted by Yin's (2014) suggestion that a case study be used when "multiple sources" are used in a "real-world context" to conduct "an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth" and that "the research relies on specific theories to guide the collection of data when the investigator has little control over events" (p. 16). My research draws upon "multiple sources" (documents, interviews, observations) in the "real-world context" of instrumental music lessons to investigate the "contemporary phenomenon" of improvisation in graded music examinations (the ABRSM & TCL's *jazz* and *classical* curricula). The "specific theories" of this research are based on the socio-cultural framework (3.1.1) used by Littleton & Mercer (2010) and Miell & Littleton (2008) that maintain knowledge (i.e. of improvisation) is actively constructed and negotiated by the stakeholders.

Having decided to use a case study, the next step was to define the details through a critical review of comparable case-study literature related to curricula within music education institutions (see Appendix A). While none of these included music improvisation, three studies emerged as strong influences on my case study design: Music technology within university music curriculum (Cremata, 2010), Music composition as prescribed in US secondary school music curriculum (Menard, 2015), and the entire undergraduate music curriculum at an Australian conservatoire (Carey & Lebler, 2012). The following sub-sections draw from these studies to help determine the boundaries and units of analysis (3.2.1.2) contained within each case.

3.2.1.1 the two cases: (1) 'ABRSM' & (2) 'TCL'

Identifying the boundaries of the phenomenon of interest (what a case is and is not) is key to distinguishing the exact identity of the case. The relationship between a case and its boundaries, commonly referred to as a 'bounded system' (Yin, 2014;

Stake, 2006; Creswell, 2007), accounts for the identifiable boundaries of context in which the case is situated "in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries" (Creswell, 2007, p. 485). In congruence with the socio-cultural theoretical framework underpinning this research (3.1.1), all boundaries are based on naturally-occurring phenomena to avoid fabricating social situations or manipulating the contexts of the stakeholders (e.g. altering the content of the music lessons). A potential pitfall occurs to me here: a failure to have clearly-defined naturally-occurring boundaries may result in a failure to have meaningful research findings.

I recognise that these cases of this thesis are nested in naturally-occurring 'boundaries' (Stake, 2006; Creswell, 2007) formed by the five stakeholders (2.2), the contexts of the examinations (e.g. grade, instrument, syllabus) and the pedagogical practices in which they are undertaken (e.g. environments, musical and teaching cultures). I will draw upon the conclusions from the sample cases from the review of case study literature (Appendix A) to argue that structuring two cases bounded by the specific improvisation-related content within will best allow me to address the main research questions (see 2.5).

The use of more than one case, termed a 'multi', 'multiple' or 'collectively-designed' case study (i.e. Yin, 2014; Stake, 2006; Robson, 2002) has the benefit of gathering evidence that arose independently from multiple sources and can therefore be more robust and compelling than evidence arising from a single case (Yin, 2014; Robson, 2002). The use of more than one case to increase robustness and related reliability is not without contention. There is a theoretical argument that using more than one case is akin to the rationale behind a controlled experiment with a repeated design of slightly varied contexts (i.e. Yin, 2014 and Stake, 2006). In addition, single-case study designs have effectively been used in music curricula research with the aim of making a single exhaustive analysis of one environment, such as the entire curricula of a conservatoire (i.e. Carey & Lebler, 2010). I argue that designing more than one case is appropriate for this research because it is not a repeated-design experiment nor does this research focus on just one curriculum.

In support of a multiple-case design, the research literature on music curricula that have the greatest similarity and impact on my case-study design (i.e. Cremata, 2010;

Menard, 2015; Carey & Lebler, 2012) have conceived and analysed multiple cases as separate and naturally-occurring phenomena rather than as controlled experiments with repeated designs under slight varied contexts. In congruence with the literature review (Appendix A) and recently-presented multiple-case theory (i.e. Yin, 2014; Robson, 2002), the use of more than one case by both Cremata (2010) and Menard (2015) made their analyses appear to be more robust and the discussions more compelling in comparison to the thin-on-details single case of Carey & Lebler (2012).

Weighing up case study theory and recent research application, I concluded that exploring two separate cases using the same case study design, methodology and methods of investigation allowed me to map out as well as critically explore the curricula of two major examination boards. In terms of the appropriate scale of the cases, Cremata's (2012) PhD thesis provided an excellent model for the number of cases (two cases at two separate schools), expansiveness of data collection and analysis needed to present convincing outcomes within the format and limitations of a successful PhD thesis.

3.2.1.2 the units of analysis: (1) 'classical' and (2) 'jazz'

The 'units of analysis' focus on separate phenomena within a case and should answer the question: *What or who am I selecting to answer my research questions?* (Yin, 2014; Stake, 2006; Robson, 2002). This thesis explores two units of analysis, improvisation within the (1) *classical* and (2) *jazz* curricula of each case (ABRSM & TCL). Analysing data from more than one unit of analysis requires utilising a research design that enables all of the data from each case to be incorporated effectively. A useful framework for this type of design is provided by Yin (2014) as having 'embedded' units of analysis[31], meaning each unit of analysis should carry equal weight to avoid favouring or minimising data. Thus, the data relating to the jazz

[31] Case study research literature exploring music curricula with embedded units of analysis design are presented in Appendix A.

curricula (i.e. communications and artefacts) of both cases (ABRSM & TCL) should be treated with equal consideration through an embedded design.

As a caveat, I would contend that Yin's (2014) notion of equal consideration is not always clear-cut in my research. For example, a chief syllabus author and the parent of a music student are authorities within separate areas, and while I would be inclined to give statements by either equal consideration, one might carry more weight depending upon the context. To maintain clarity and maintain the validity of my research, I will therefore make clear the role(s) attached to each voice used in data analysis and presentation.

Drawing together my research questions with the rationale behind my units of analysis, I have generated the following figure depicting the basic relationships of an *embedded multi-case design* based on Yin (2014, p. 50).[32]

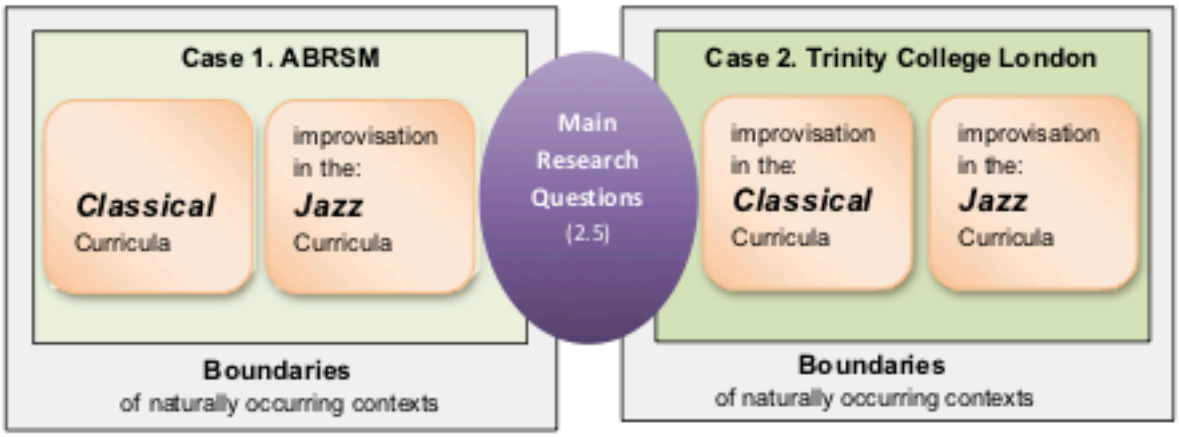


Figure 3 Embedded units case study design.

The organisation of my embedded units case study design is illustrated in Figure 3. Note that the units of analysis (orange boxes) are embedded into the two cases

[32] Yin's original illustration of an embedded units design (2014, p. 50) contains no reference to the key research questions. To minimise the risk of losing sight of my original questions, I placed my research questions in the centre of Figure 3. I have also arranged the units of analysis in a horizontal row to signify their equal relevance, whereas Yin's original illustration displayed them obliquely.

(shown in green). The cases and units of analysis are all situated into boundaries formed by naturally-occurring contexts (e.g. syllabuses, pedagogical practices).

Rationale behind 'embedded units'

My decision to use two units of analyses ('Classical' & 'Jazz' curricula) within each case was derived from my review of relevant research literature (see Table 10 in Appendix A). Most influential was Cremata's (2010) thesis exploring *the uses of music technology as prescribed in university music curriculum* which explored four cases divided equally between two different sites. His 2+2 design sets an excellent template and scale for gathering enough data to answer research questions that were comparable to the ones of this thesis. A second influence, Menard's (2015) study of *music composition* in secondary school curriculum was written as a journal article and within that word length, explored only half as many cases (two cases in separate sites). Both authors argued that a multiple-case design was the most suitable for gaining a better understanding their phenomena of interest.

While Menard (2015) was able to present enough data to arrive at a compelling conclusion, the details were limited by the limited word length of the journal article format. Having more space in a PhD dissertation than a journal article, Cremata focused on four cases occurring at two sites. His conclusions are a compelling blend of breadth and depth and thus his PhD thesis served as a strong example for me to gage the size of the case design that I will need to investigate to strongly answer my research questions within the space of a PhD thesis.

3.2.1.3 summary of the case study

Section 3.2.1 developed the multiple-case study within the research methodology that manages the relevant methods used to address the main research questions. Key terms and concepts from case study theory were presented and critically evaluated in the context of my research and socio-cultural framework. I concluded that a case study:

- …is part of the methodology, where it acts as a manager that guides the collection and analysis of data;
- …enables an investigation of a contemporary phenomenon (i.e. how improvisation is defined, assessed and perceived in the context of the ABRSM and TCL instrumental examinations;
- …relies on socio-cultural theories to guide data collection (i.e. knowledge is - constructed through social interaction over time);
- …is conducted in real-life contexts, especially when the researcher has little control over naturally occurring events like instrumental music lessons.

It was concluded that a 'case' distinguishes itself from the 'case study' by being the phenomenon that we are interested in, not the strategy that we use to find it. Having conducted a review of relevant case study research literature (Appendix A) I drew upon the key case studies of music curricula (Menard, 2015; Carey & Lebler, 2012; Cremata, 2010) to develop the rationale for using two cases focusing on improvisation within (1) ABRSM and (2) TCL examinations. Recognising that cases are situated within recognisable naturally-occurring boundaries (3.2.1.1) I identified the boundaries of my two cases as being formed by the five principle stakeholders (see 2.2), pedagogical practices (2.2.2) as cultural traditions associated with improvisation (2.3.2).

Addressing the question, 'what or who am I selecting to answer my research questions?' enabled me to locate the specific units of analysis (3.2.1.2) that I will address within each case (improvisation in *Classical* and *Jazz* curricula). The rationale being that (1) these are the only two genres that exist in common with both the ABRSM and TCL and (2) this would make for an even 2+2 embedded unit design (Yin, 2014) and closely resemble the scope of design successfully used by Cremata's (2012) doctoral research (see Appendix A).

Section 3.2.1 concluded with a statement about the aims and limitations of my collective case study design. I recognise that my case study cannot offer universal proofs about improvisation in entire populations of music examination candidates. Recalling Bassey (1999), I argue that my case study can provide an understanding

of the complexities regarding the assessment of improvisation in particular contexts that are possible or likely to be found occurring elsewhere.

3.3 Methods

At the outset of Chapter Three, I identified the research questions, principal stakeholders and the methods that would be best for gathering related evidence. The rest of this chapter draws upon qualitative research theory and key research studies to refine the details of how data will be collected, managed and analysed. The first section (3.3.1) builds a framework for document analysis based on Fairclough's (2013) critical discourse analysis in order to explore the syllabuses and institutional websites of the ABRSM and TCL. I will argue that these documents are indicators of how improvisation is defined, assessed and perceived by the stakeholders associated with the examination boards. To do so, I will assert that a 'document' goes beyond a text /image-based record of what was said or written, to be a record of a type of *social fact* (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997) that reveals individual or group perceptions of social, cultural and political events (i.e. Silverman, 2014; Olson, 2010). As a result, documents such as ABRSM or TCL syllabuses and webpages can help address the research questions by communicating how perceptions and practices of improvisation are produced, shared and utilised through the graded examination curricula (i.e. Thompson, 2007; Parkes & Harris, 2002).

The second half of the methods section will discuss the use of observations of instrumental music lessons plus interviews with the participants. Designed in conjunction with the case study (3.2) the observations and interviews address the research questions from the perspectives of the teaching-and-learning stakeholders. Sampling decisions as well as details regarding the collection, collation and analysis of data will be distilled from a review of similar case study literature. The section concludes with a demonstration of how 'condensation analysis' (3.3.3) of observation/interview transcripts is used to illuminate the practices and perceptions of the music teachers, students and parents that use and interpret the documents produced by the examination boards.

3.3.1 Documents analysis.

A 'document' such as a graded music syllabus, can have multiple levels of meaning. The most basic level is a textual and image-based record of what was said or written (i.e. Bowen, 2009). A second level explores the interpretation of documents as they are actively shaped by their authors and readers (i.e. Grbich, 2013). A third level explores the broader social contexts affecting the texts and image being studied making a 'document' a record of individual or group perceptions of social, cultural and political events (i.e. Silverman, 2014; Olson, 2010, Atkinson and Coffey, 1997) that can be shaped to suit their own purposes (i.e. Grbich, 2013).

The most basic level can be characterised by Bowen's (2009) conclusion that a 'document' contains "text (words) and images that have been recorded without a researcher's intervention" such as *advertisements*, *books*, *brochures*, *institutional reports* and *web pages* (p. 27). Bowen's definition and examples focus on description but neglect the potential social dimensions and interpretations of documents such as how syllabuses are interpreted and communicated in different pedagogical practices.

Researchers exploring documents as interpretation and communication (Silverman, 2014; Olson, 2010; Merriam, 1992) have asserted that documents can be used as clues for gaining insight into specific cultures (i.e. examination board ethos or teaching-and-learning practices) because they are created over time and through daily activities. Going further, Atkinson and Coffey (1997) argue that documents are a type of 'social fact' that are produced, shared and then used in socially-organized ways (p. 47). This suggests that the meanings of improvisation in the ABRSM and TCL are shared between musicians through pedagogical and instrumental practices that develop over time. Thus, while a document such as a jazz flute syllabus can provide a recording of words and images, it is more important to my research to observe the use of that document as a social tool between participants over time (e.g. over a series of jazz flute music lessons).

Using the term 'shaping' to describe the active social organisation of meaning, Grbich (2013) illustrates that a documents authors and readers are actively involved in constructing the meanings of the documents over time. From Grbich, I became aware that I was actively involved with influencing how the documents written by examination boards and used in instrumental music lessons are interpreted via my document analyses and through conversations with my case study participants. Realising that this was a potential concern regarding validity (i.e. would results obviously shaped by a researcher be convincing?), prompted me to include opportunities for representatives from the examination boards and case study participants to respond to my interpretations of the documents after my preliminary analyses were completed. This resulted in stronger validity and in a greater understanding of how the individual stakeholders (and the researcher) shaped their perceptions of improvisation before and after a graded music examination.

3.3.1.1 significance of documents on institutional websites

From the outset of this thesis, it was my belief that the institutional websites of the ABRSM and TCL would house the most useful libraries of data related to improvisation within the examination boards. In addition to housing syllabuses and assessment documents, I believed they served as a cultural and social record as well as a central link between the stakeholders in this thesis. Consequently, specific documents such as a *graded music syllabus*, *assessment rubric, or description of how examiners were trained were* among the most important sources for addressing the main research questions; how improvisation is defined, practiced and assessed within the contexts of graded music examinations.

Defining a 'document'

In addition to housing text and images (i.e. Bowen, 2009), websites enable the institutions to position themselves in competition with similar educational institutions (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Anctil, 2008; Connell & Galasinski, 1998). Since there was a lack of research literature focusing specifically on the website documents of music examination boards (who represent multiple conservatories, some of which

are part of a larger college or university),[33] I drew upon similar investigations of how universities and colleges used language to present salient information in their syllabuses and websites (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015, Saichaie, 2011, Chiper, 2006) to guide the methodology.

The literature focusing on websites of educational institutions reinforces the position that the websites are central tools of communication between stakeholders. In addition to rapidly communicating significant information to a global audience (Anctil, 2008; Kwong, 2000) websites typically have an additional role as an ambassador meaning that students and parents visiting college websites are greeted with a 'digital handshake' (Anctil, 2008) and given a virtual tour of the history, location and community of the institution. This suggests that the institutional websites of the ABRSM and TCL can serve as the first, and sometimes only, impression of the institution and/or improvisation assessment to their candidates and other stakeholders such as parents or teachers (i.e. Saichaie, 2011; Hossler *et al.*,1999).

This thread of research studies unanimously agrees that in the contemporary global society, there is competition between colleges producing similar services and products such as competition for customers (i.e. students, parents & teachers), resources (i.e. funding) and prestige (i.e. global reputation and related consumer confidence). To maintain a competitive advantage, educational institutions must endeavour to stand out with distinctive images and brands (Saichaie, 2011) and show convincing evidence (e.g. images, logos, text, slogans, endorsements) that support their claim to be providing the best products (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Fairclough, 2013). Following this, it is likely that a document analysis of improvisation in the websites should consider if and how improvisation is used by the examination boards as a product to help maintain a competitive advantage.

There is also evidence (i.e. Saichaie, 2011) that colleges are increasingly adopting free-market practices termed *academic marketing* (Kwong, 2000). This can be found in discourse drawn from the corporate world which is used by the colleges to market

[33] ABRSM currently represents the four UK Royal conservatories and TCL is associated with Trinity Laban Conservatoire and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama).

themselves and provide information to their customers.[34] Research that locates academic marketing practices within college websites and the downloadable content retrieved from within them (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Saichaie, 2011; Connell & Galasinski, 1998) is relevant because it frames the discourse of improvisation within the ABRSM and TCL syllabuses and websites as imbued with marketing terminology and corporate competition. Through this lens, improvisation in graded music examinations can be viewed as products being marketed to global customers with 'improvisation' being included to add value to an examination board's image and brand. This is a key theme that will later be drawn upon when addressing how the ABRSM and TCL perceive improvisation within their curricula (see 4.3).

3.3.1.2 critical discourse analysis: key literature

Having reviewed the methodological literature focusing on interpreting the syllabuses and websites of educational institutions as communicative documents, I chose to build on a thread of research that draws upon Fairclough's (2013) *critical discourse analysis* to explore how education institutions market their curricula through the language in their documents. All of which, particularly Saichaie's (2011) PhD thesis, influenced my interpretation and analysis of the improvisation-related curricula of the ABRSM and TCL. These studies are presented in Table 5 and subsequently unpacked:

[34] Findings indicating that both ABRSM and TCL present improvisation in marketing language is presented in connection with how they *define* (4.1) and *perceive* (4.3) improvisation.

Table 5 Key studies investigating education institution websites with CDA.

Research	Institutions	Web Pages	Analysis	Relevance
Hoang & Rojas-Lizana (2015)	University of Melbourne & MacQuarie University	• Home • About Us • Future Student	CDA Fairclough, 2013 Text & Images	-Provides a clear template for comparing key textual and visual content in social context. -Also compares and contrasts two universities (older vs newer)
Saichaie (2011) PhD thesis	13 US colleges/ universities placed into four groups categorised by similarity.	• Home • About • Admissions • Academic Majors • Programs • Financial Aid • Student Life	CDA Fairclough, 1993; 1995; 2001 Text & Images	-Provides a sense of PhD scale (six web pages from four different sites). -Provides the best template for presenting my data (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana based theirs on his). -Three relevant themes emerged from Saichaie's critical discourse analysis: *similarity, uncertainty* and *control*.
Chiper (2006)	10 Romanian universities + several EU universities (number unspecified)	Mission statements, goals and organizational charts were viewed.	CDA Fairclough, 1995 Text, no images	-Conversational vs formal style -Homogeneity vs regional differences -Interests/traditions

Chiper (2006)

The thread of critical discourse analysis began Chiper's (2006) study of how older and newer Romanian universities represent themselves on their institutional websites. Chiper found that the sampled EU universities all strove to create a professional image by presenting themselves like prestigious international enterprises. As part of this, the discourse of younger universities had a more-conversational style than older ones in that they attempted to foster a relationship with potential students. Conversely, the discourse of older universities was drier, more official, conservative and opaque than the younger ones because their goals were to create an image of exclusivity and establish homogeneity with other older leading institutions.

A shortcoming of Chiper's (2006) research is that it does not provide details about the exact websites and printed documents that were selected, nor are we given a

rationale behind their selection. However, the findings are valuable for addressing the perceptions and definitions of improvisation as they indicate analyses of the examination boards websites could consider how language is used to appeal to improvisation candidates (e.g. 'classical saxophone improvisation' vs 'jazz sax improv') and market improvisation as part of institution exclusivity.

Saichaie (2011)

Saichaie's (2011) PhD thesis used critical discourse analysis to examine how US universities differing in location, admission selectivity and standing (reputation/prestige) represented themselves and their curricula both textually and visually on their institutional websites. Providing clearer methodological details than Chiper (2006), Saichaie (2011) analysed six webpages (e.g. 'Home', 'About') of four contrasting universities. There were several relevant findings. First, the study reaffirmed the growth of consumerism in higher education as evidenced through the utilisation of promotional discourse within the sampled documents (i.e. Anctil, 2008; Kwong, 2000). Second, it was found that education institutions could control the discourse on their websites through choosing what to present, emphasise and exclude (Saichaie, 2011). Related to this, institutions could purposely generate uncertainty by not including information. These last findings are particularly useful for interpreting the comparative lack of information about improvisation and its assessment in the websites of the ABRSM and TCL and how the stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation are shaped as a consequence.

Hoang & Rojas-Lizana (2015)

Building directly upon the researcher of both Chiper (2006) and Saichaie (2011), Hoang & Rojas-Lizana (2015) used critical discourse analysis as part of a case study of two Australian universities. The study compared and contrasted how an older university (University of Melbourne) and a younger (Macquarie University) represented themselves and their curricula through their websites. By utilising Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional framework, the researchers found that both universities exhibited promotional discourse reflecting the impacts of globalisation and the trend of academic marketing in higher education, thus re-affirming Saichaie's findings in a different county. Of significance to my thesis is that their comparison of the two cases revealed web-based representations published by both educational

institutions were determined by both social trends plus their own traditions and reputations. This offers new tools for addressing the research questions. For example, when addressing how improvisation is perceived within graded examinations, I will need to consider social trends (e.g. modern repertoire, 'creativity' as a current buzzword) as well as the reputations and traditions of the institutions and the music teachers for whom exam preparation is a significant part of their profession.

Hoang & Rojas-Lizana's (2015) collected data during a two-month period in 2012 and focusing on three specific web pages from the two universities: 'Home', 'About', and 'Future Student'. These pages were selected for sampling because they were the most visited by potential students. This decision is based on rationale put forth by Hossler *et al.* (1999) that the 'Home Page' gives customers the first impression of the institution (e.g. images demonstrating diversities and prestige). The 'About Page' is where viewers explore the history, traditions and diverse departments within a university. The 'Future Student Page' provides information of courses, registration and finances.

Following this rationale, I conducted a similar data collection and analysis of the Home and About pages of both examination boards as part of my pilot study (see Appendix C). Specifically, Hoang & Rojas-Lizana (2015) used analysis steps provided by Fairclough (2013; 1995a) along with Saichaie's (2011) templates for recording website content (see Appendix B) to present a description of a webpage followed by an interpretation of the same page. After presenting descriptions and interpretations of each page, I presented a contextual analysis with the goal of comparing and contrasting how the two boards represented improvisation on their webpages. From this, I was able to analyse how improvisation was communicated as a product used to generate institutional prestige and as a practice capable of being assessed. The outcomes of these analyses will be addressed further in Chapter Four.

3.3.1.3 critical discourse analysis: theoretical framework

The following section takes a closer look at how critical discourse analysis was used in the studies introduced in the previous section (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Saichaie, 2011; Chiper, 2006) in order to construct the CDA-based approach that will be used to address the research questions by uncovering the ideologies and socially-rooted perceptions and practices of improvisation. By the end of this section, the methods for analysing the examination board documents will be constructed allowing me to investigate the definitions, assessment procedures and perception of improvisation as communicated through their documents.

The critical discourse analysis used by Saichaie (2011) is an interdisciplinary approach for analysing discourse that views language as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 2013). In this view, the ways in which people use spoken or written language are not only determined by social relationships, but in part maintain those relationships. This is in part navigated by an important distinction between 'discourse' and 'text' in which 'discourse' is conceived as a *process* whereas 'text' is conceived as a *product*. For example, the discourse occurring between examination board executives about 'improvisation' in a graded syllabus is a *process*, whereas the text and music notation published within that syllabus is a *product* of their discourse. Critical discourse analysis thus explores the *productive* processes (i.e. text/images on a page) and *interpretative* processes (i.e. how the messages of combined text and image are drawn upon as a resource) of discourse (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015, p. 6). These processes highlight the social qualities of CDA as a method of document analysis by focusing on the interplay between properties of text/image with the social knowledge of the stakeholders and are congruent with the socio-cultural framework established earlier in this thesis (see 3.1.1).

When analysing discourse in the documents of educational institutions, the three key studies of the last section drew upon Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional framework for discourse analysis (see Figure 4) that considers three dimensions of discourse: (1) *textual*, (2) *process* and (3) *societal*. The first dimension, 'textual analysis' is a *description* stage that studies the linguistic elements of the text. 'Process analysis' is an *interpretation* stage that studies the production and

consumption of the text/image by focusing on factors used in its construction and interpretation. Lastly, the 'societal analysis' endeavours to explain the broader social contexts affecting the text/image being studied.

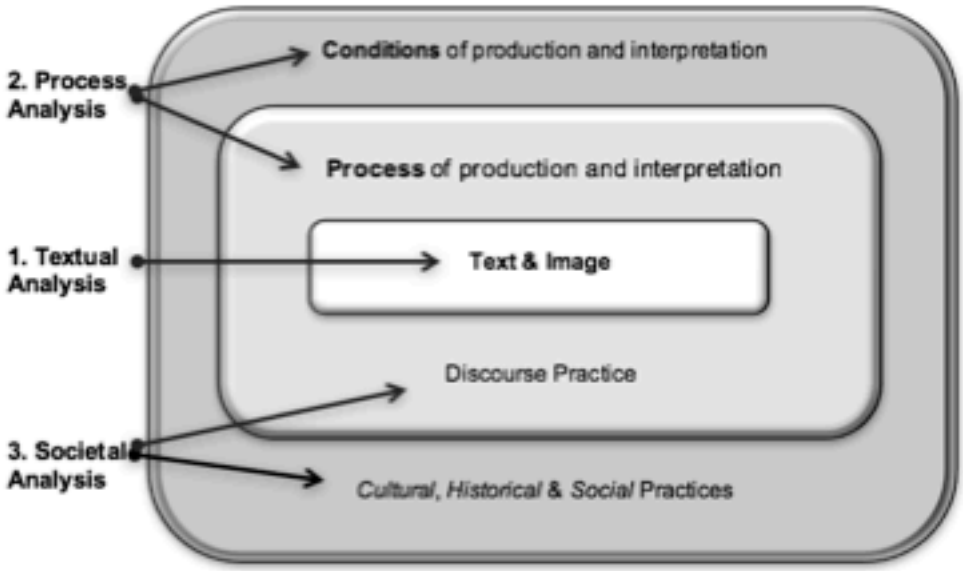


Figure 4 CDA: Fairclough's three dimensions of discourse analysis.

Textual analysis

The first dimension, *textual analysis*, uses texts as objects of analysis. Properties of the textual and visual elements are described and may incorporate verbal and/or visual texts. For example, the repetition of words like 'world-leading', 'most-popular' and 'top' on college websites (and those of the ABRSM & TCL) are used to reaffirm the overall messages that the institutions aim to project (Saichaie, 2011). In some cases, visuals can operate in place of text to contribute to the discourse of the overall message (Hall, 1997; Chiper, 2005) such as demonstrating ethnic diversity (see Appendix B) or association with prestigious orchestral settings (see Appendix C).

Recent research indicates that third-party logos and icons acting to reaffirm institutional ranking (e.g. ABRSM's 'Royal' label and icon of a crown) are increasingly being presented with text (i.e. Fairclough, 2013; 1993; Janks, 2005). This is important because it indicates that for my research to be in line with current

CDA practices utilising Fairclough's dimension of textual analysis, I must explore how image and text interact with each other (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Saichaie, 2011), not solely text as the object of analysis (i.e. Chiper, 2005). Findings from my pilot study (see Appendix D) confirmed this and revealed how images were used by ABRSM and TCL to make distinctions between candidates of different music genres and market improvisation to those perceived candidates (i.e. classical genre candidates are usually dressed formally seated in orchestral settings whereas jazz and pop/rock candidates are more often dressed casually in non-orchestral settings).

Process Analysis

The second dimension of Fairclough's (2013) framework, *process analysis*, shifts from a micro analysis of text and image to a macro analysis in which the researcher determines the discourse practices that speak to larger societal structures. Process analysis makes the key distinction between text (a product) and discourse (a process) and uses it to unpack text/image messages by examining their functional parts to interpret the relationship between the data and its producers (i.e. the process of discourse). Examples include the contents of the language, the subjects and relationships of the subjects (Fairclough, 2013; 1995a). Process analysis is important for interpreting how information related to improvisation services are expressed differently through the use of language and images (i.e. Venegas, 2006).

Societal Analysis

The third dimension of Fairclough's framework, *societal analysis,* moves most in the direction of a macro-analysis by integrating the language of the source data with larger historical, social, cultural, and political discourses. This allows the researcher to examine the social determinants and effect of discourse in order to explain why such constructions are being used (Fairclough, 2013). A key aspect of societal analysis is that social practices and social conditions are viewed as ways of preserving and controlling the selection of structural possibilities, while at the same time, excluding other possibilities in some areas of social life (Fairclough, 1995a). To explain this, I will return to a recently used example from the textual analysis section. The use of words like 'world-leading', 'most-popular' and 'top' in addition to icons associated with illustrious third-parties, such as the ABRSM's use of the 'Royal' and 'ISM' logos, can be viewed as representing the music examination board's

preoccupation with establishing an identity that reflects levels of prestige, while simultaneously dispelling questionable past or present moments of its reputation.[35]

Summary of 'documents' literature and analysis framework

A document such as a graded music syllabus can be a cultural and social record that is a central link between the stakeholders in this thesis. This interpretation of 'document' as being both socially-produced and socially-organised (Appendix D) is especially relevant because it aligns with the socio-cultural theoretical framework of my thesis (3.1.1) and methods of discourse analysis (i.e. Fairclough, 2013; Saichaie, 2011). Flowing from this, specific documents such as a *graded music syllabus* or *assessment rubrics* are among the most important sources for addressing the main research questions; how improvisation is defined, practiced and assessed within the contexts of graded music examinations.

Previous research (i.e. Anctil, 2008; Kwong, 2000; Connell & Galasinski, 1998) has found academic marketing practices within college websites and the downloadable content retrieved from within them. This is relevant because it frames the discourse of improvisation within the ABRSM and TCL syllabuses and websites as imbued with marketing terminology and corporate competition. Consequently, graded examinations can be viewed as products being marketed to global customers with 'improvisation' being included to add value to the image and brand.

Analysis of documents on institutional websites are thus useful for answering the third research question by bringing light to the examination boards' perceptions of improvisation. This is because graded music examination boards, like the colleges whom they represent, can establish and shape distinctive identities through documents in order to attract students and build legitimacy (3.3.1.2). For example, instrumental music teachers may shape their perceptions of documents to suit the needs of their teaching practices and/or the goals of their students. My own perceptions as the researcher can shape how I determine the relevance and content of the same document. In response, my case study has included 'member checks' in

[35] Examples of how I used Fairclough's (2013) framework as developed by Saichaie (2011) to analyse the ABRSM and TCL institutional websites can be found in Appendix B, (website banners) and Appendix C (Home and About pages).

which I verify my perceptions with the participants. I have also included post-observation interviews in which I present my findings to the research participants and representatives of the ABRSM and TCL to verify my perceptions of the curricula as well as the transcribed interviews and observations with the research participants.

3.3.1.4 sampling and timeline

The sample selection was based on the key studies reviewed in section 3.3.1.2 and the related 'purposeful sampling' technique (Patton, 2002) used in the research of Saichaie (2011) and Gee (2005). *Purposeful sampling* is the deliberate carefully-considered selection of a sample that allows a researcher to focus in great detail on a specific issue, subject, or phenomenon. Both Saichaie (2011) and Gee (2005) argued that is appropriate for investigating information-rich online material such as web pages and pdf files in depth. Recalling that my multi-case study (see 3.2.1.3) focused on assessed improvisation within two examination boards (the ABRSM and TCL) and two genres within each (classical and jazz) to answer the research questions, I organised my document samples into matching groups with genre-specific sub-categories (see Table 6).

Table 6 Document analysis: sample institutions.

	ABRSM	TCL
Classical	**Printed/PDF Documents:** • All classical instrumental syllabuses (grades 1-8) • Your Guide to Exams	**Printed/PDF Documents:** • All Instrumental Syllabuses (grades 1-8) • Information and Regulations
Classical	**Online Documents: abrsm.org** • Home • About • Our Exams (+ sub categories including syllabus pdfs) • Support (test samples) • Publications	**Online Documents: trinitycollege.com** • Home ('Music' is a subcategory) • About • Music Grade Exams (+ sub categories including syllabus pdfs) • Supporting tests (samples +backing tracks) • Music Publications
Jazz	**Printed/PDF Documents:** • All jazz instrumental syllabuses (grades 1-5) • Your Guide to Exams	**Printed/PDF Documents:** • All jazz instrumental syllabuses (grades 1-8) • Information and Regulations
Jazz	**Online Documents: abrsm.org** • Home • About • Our Exams (+ sub categories including all jazz instrumental syllabus pdfs) • Support (test samples) • Publications	**Online Documents: trinitycollege.com** • Home ('Music' is a subcategory) • About • Music Grade Exams (+ sub categories including all jazz instrumental syllabus pdfs) • Supporting tests (samples +backing tracks) • Music Publications

Table 6 indicates the specific document sampling locations for each unit of analysis. The inclusion of the following webpages was prompted by the CDA research of education-based institutional websites by Hoang & Rojas-Lizana (2015) and Saichaie, (2011) detailed in section 3.3.1.1:

- 'Home Page'
- 'About Page' [offers descriptions of the institution]
- 'Our Exams' (ABRSM) & 'Music Grade Exams' (TCL) [lists of syllabuses and addendums]
- 'Support' (ABRSM) & 'Supporting Tests' (TCL) [offers ancillary support for the exams and texting samples]

- ‘Publications’ (ABRSM) & ‘Music Publications’ (TCL) [links to their recommended improvisation publications]

These main types of educational institution website pages, described by Saichaie as a ‘landing page’ (2011, p. 63), consist of a topic with hyperlinks to different content. For example, the ABRSM’s ‘Our Exams’ webpage is primarily comprised of hyperlinked lists of exam syllabuses ranked in order of popularity. In instances where the lading page leads to a series of other hyperlinked pages, Saichaie (2011) recommends including one degree of separation (one ‘click-through’) so that the researcher can navigate to and investigate a page that most directly relates to the main topic. Thus from ‘Our Exams’, the viewer and researcher can click through to the individual jazz or classical syllabuses.

Applying Saichaie’s ‘one click-through’ guideline to my research is especially important for pages like ‘Our Exams’ that offer little content other than click-throughs to downloadable and online examination syllabuses. In addition, the amounts of click-through layers that viewers have to drill through to find the documents that they seek can be relevant to my third research question as an indicator of how the examination boards perceive the relevance of their improvisation-related content. Online data collection did not follow a specific path beyond the one degree of separation/click-through past the target page to the related-topic areas. As Flick (2009) argues, planned flexibility is necessary for research investigating changing artefacts like websites. Hence when topical webpages presented multiple hyperlink options, I attempted to locate the most appropriate and relevant web page based on the key topics (Table 6) within one click-through (i.e. Saichaie, 2011, p. 63). All decisions regarding this process were recorded in my researcher journal.

The sample selection (Table 6) is congruent with the theoretical and methodological framework of CDA (Fairclough, 2013) in that it can be used to examine comparable and contrasting artefacts (displayed adjacently). The sampled documents were available on both institutions’ websites (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Saichaie, 2011). It is important to note that some labels were not identical. For example, the ABRSM’s ‘Our Exams’ and TCL’s ‘Music Grade Exams’ are different headings that

contained similar content. They are displayed adjacently in Table 6 because of the similarity of content. All differences in labels and page titles will be noted and discussed during the analysis (i.e. Saichaie, 2011).

The grouping of the ABRSM and TCL documents separately is consistent with existing research examining textual and visual elements as represented in admission and recruitment materials distributed by universities and colleges (i.e. Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Within each case (e.g. ABRSM Classical & ABRSM Jazz) are similarities across introductions, rationales, timetables, geographic locations and grade levels.

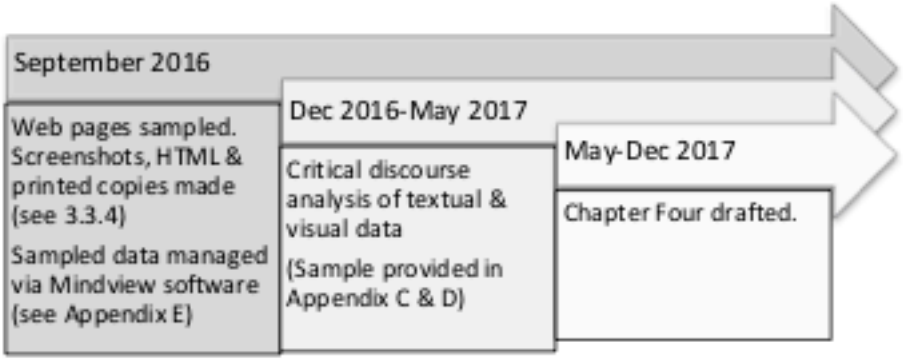
Between each case (e.g. ABRSM Classical & TCL Classical) are significant variances. For example, the ABRSM focuses only on music, whereas TCL initially presents itself with a combination of music, dance and English language testing. The ABRSM and TCL were grouped separately according to the rationale of my case study (3.2.1.2) but also so that I could explore how the images and text used on The ABRSM and TCL's websites compared between each group (i.e. Saichaie, 2011).

Note from the Pilot Study

During the pilot stages of this research in the Spring of 2015, data was collected from online question-and-answer forums housed within the ABRSM's and TCL's official websites. When presenting my data to the academic committee at the end of my first-year viva voce, a concern was voiced by the panel that these online forums were not a source for credible data. The reason being that the examination boards can screen and edit all content before it is posted online. It was therefore not possible to establish what comments were approved, rejected or edited prior to or after being posted in the online forums. The advice of the panel was taken and online forums were not used as a source of data collection.

Document sampling timeline

The institutional websites were viewed twice, once in September 2016 and once in December-January 2016. The two viewings allowed me to examine changes in representational language and image at two points in time (i.e. Saichaie, 2011) thereby strengthening the internal validity of the research by providing multiple points of data that can be triangulated (i.e. Saichaie, 2011; Chiper, 2006). In both sampling periods, all web pages specified in the sample selection (see 3.3.1.4) were printed and a screen shot was made of each one.



Mindful that the websites would change content during my research, I used the images taken on 10 September 2016 to conduct the analysis. The structure of the ABRSM and TCL websites as well as their 10 Sept 2016 content were replicated using *Mindview*, a mind-mapping software (see Appendix E).[36] In addition to screenshots, all webpages were also saved in HTML to preserve textual and visual representations in a way that could easily be searched with a standard computer search tool such as 'Find' or 'Spotlight Search'. The few significant changes noted in the Dec-January sample were comprised of new blog posts and images. Having made screen shots, HTML and printed copies of the web pages, I was able to conduct pencil-on-paper analysis (see 3.3.1.5) guided by the frameworks and rubrics of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Janks (2005) as detailed by Saichaie (2011). This procedure enabled all relevant online and traditional printed documents (e.g. a

[36] Using the mind-mapping layout was a novel approach and I am unaware of any other researcher who has written about doing this as part of a document analysis. My decision to do so was based on comments by Bergman & Meier (2004) in which they state the benefits of preserving both the dynamic and static contents of original website data samples helps capture specific contexts (e.g. the specific sequences of ABRSM and TCL's automatically-scrolling banners).

printed jazz flute syllabus) to be analysed using the same tools and scrutiny by the same researcher.

3.3.1.5 data analysis

The following section provides details for the sampled documents that were analysed based on the recently constructed critical discourse analysis framework (see 3.3.1.3). Both *visual* (e.g. images, pictures) and *textual* linguistic artefacts of web-based documents (3.3.1.1) were used to answer the research questions by determining how examination boards represented themselves, improvisation and assessment through their documents (e.g. websites and syllabuses). The same documents were later drawn upon during the observations and interviews of music lessons to learn how the definitions and perceptions of improvisations were interpreted through the social interactions of music lessons. A process emerged of improvisation migrating from the product level (i.e. syllabus authors adding specific text and images) to a process level in which syllabus and website meanings were debated and negotiated between the teaching-and-learning stakeholders.

Visual data

Building on the success of Saichaie's (2011) PhD research, I used Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) analytical model (Appendix B) to evaluate how the placement of language on a page affects its information value. The perceived value of information within institutional websites like those of the ABRSM and Trinity College can be distinguished by viewing a page as a theoretical *vertical* or *horizontal* triptych. The placement of text, images and menu within a triptych is directly related to how the institution intends viewers to relate to their content (*ibid*). Thus, a message's location relates to my third research question because it communicates the perceived value that the syllabus authors place upon content such as 'improvisation'.

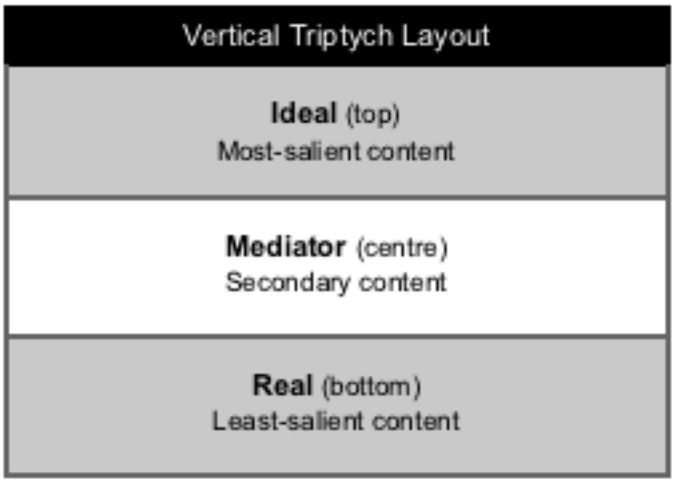


Figure 5 Kress & van Leeuwen's three-column vertical triptych.

The three areas of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) vertical triptych model are: 'ideal' (top), 'mediator' (middle) and 'real' (bottom). *Ideal* content is perceived by the author/producer of a page to have the most informational value and is therefore placed at the top of the page. This is supported by subsequent website design literature (i.e. Lynch & Horton, 2009; Krug, 2006) that has shown the *ideal* space of higher education institutions is regularly filled with images that are integral to the institution's key messages such as institutional logos and banner images. The centre ('mediator') of a page provides the secondary content such as blogs, news, and featured products. The bottom ('real') section is provides more-specific fine-print content such as policies and contact information. Visual analysis will be further addressed in Chapter Four in relation to how it was used in conjunction with marketing analysis (Appendix D) to interpret the examination boards' perceptions of the improvisation as a musical practice and as a profit-generating product (4.3).

Textual data

An analysis of the textual artefacts of the documents is conducted separately but presented in conjunction with the visual analysis. Building from the thread of literature mapped in section 3.3.1.2, I drew upon a model developed by Janks (2005) that uses Fairclough's theoretical CDA framework (see 3.3.1.3) to analyse textual discourse on institutional websites. Janks' rubric for analysing pages on an institution's website (see Appendix B) was further refined by subsequent researchers

to analyse pages on *education* institutional websites such as North American (i.e. Saichaie, 2011) and Australian (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015) colleges and universities. This framework allowed me to recursively analyse the signifiers making up the text, arrangement of linguistic selections, sequence, layout and juxtaposition. Through this, I was able to interpret how the examination boards conveyed their perceptions of the relevance of improvisation and their updated marking criteria (4.3.1.3) through different areas of their webpages and syllabuses such as prominent displays versus minor blog posts (Appendix C).

Corporate language

As detailed in section 3.3.1.1, higher education organisations such as colleges and universities[37], are increasingly adopting textual 'corporate language' to establish and maintain distinctive identities. By 'corporate language', I refer to the free-market practices associated with corporate marketing (Kwong, 2000) and related discourse found within college websites (i.e. Connell & Galasinski, 1998). Efforts to include corporate language into education institution websites have been linked to goals of building prestige and increasing related social and economic strength (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Fairclough 2013; Saichaie, 2011).

It is important to be aware of corporate language when analysing and presenting the outcomes from the critical discourse analysis of the ABRSM's and TCL's representation of improvisation, assessment and themselves. The key theme that music examination boards utilise corporate language on their websites and in their products to achieve corporate-related goals of building prestige and related social and economic strength (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Saichaie, 2011; Fairclough 2013) relates directly to my research questions. The corporate goals and corporate language shape the discourse and perceptions (RQ3) of the ABRSM and TCL in regard to defining (RQ1) and assessing (RQ2) improvisation.

[37] Examples include the colleges and universities cited in Saichaie's (2011) PhD thesis. These include a variety of elite private North American universities such as Stanford (www.stanford.edu) and Princeton (www.princeton.edu) as well as state-funded universities such as Southern Oregon University (www.sou.edu) and Eastern Washington University (www.ewu.edu).

Through the document analysis it emerged that much of the information in the top and middle (*ideal* & *mediator* sections) of a page corresponds to 'Headlines' (Appendix C). They are a type of visual composition equated to the layouts used in newspapers and magazines in that they are designed to quickly attract the viewer's attention and prompt them to read further. Kress and van Leeuwen state that these short headings introduce the 'promise of the product' and 'hook' with the goal of making the viewer attend to the details placed below in the body of the page (2006, p. 203). Thus, the goal behind the page design is to quickly attract the viewer's attention and prompt them to read further. Headlines help inform the researcher of what the examination boards perceive as relevant as well as how they organize their contents. For example, the ABRSM organises classical and jazz genre improvisation under separate headlines that shape how the teaching-and-learning stakeholders interact with the information (see Appendix C) and influences their perceptions of the improvisation-related content (see 4.3.2).

Researcher's role

As discussed in my introduction to the document analysis section (3.3.1), the role(s) of the researcher are influential to the ways in which documents such a syllabus or webpage are interpreted. Recalling Grbich's (2013) point that a researcher actively 'shapes' the data since they are the principal instrument its collection, analysis, and interpretation, it is necessary to disclose personal choices and biases concerning the data when they arise.

To satisfy Grbich's (*ibid*) point and work in accordance with a Fairclough-based approach (see 3.3.1.3), I endeavoured to be up front and transparent about my biases and decision-making practices throughout this research; paying particular care to acknowledge my subjectivities during the stage of interpretation. To meet these expectations:

- I kept a research journal that includes decisions made by me as a researcher throughout the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation;

- I included 'author's notes' throughout the methodology and findings chapters to inform readers of the rationale behind research decisions that were not obvious from following other literature;
- I commenced this dissertation with an introduction to the research and the researcher (Chapter One) to make my background, intentions and biases apparent from the start.

3.3.1.6 summary of the document analysis

Document analysis was used to investigate how improvisation is defined, assessed and perceived by the ABRSM and TCL within their 'Classical' and 'Jazz' genre curricula. My analyses were based on a thread of research by Chiper (2006), Saichaie (2011) and Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, (2015) that focused on how educational institutions represented themselves and their curricula online to both domestic and global viewers. This thread of research used critical discourse analysis based on Fairclough's (2013) framework that maintains there is a dialectical relationship between language and society in which language is viewed as a social phenomenon that is both situated in society and also creates society. In CDA, analyses of text and image are evaluated on multiple levels spanning description, interpretation and the broader social contexts affecting the text/image of study.
I identified the key documents of relevance to my research, establishing that the following the ABRSM and TCL webpages would be analysed using CDA: *Home, About, Exams, Support, Publications*. These are the 'landing pages' (Saichaie, 2011) that provide what the examination boards perceive to be their most salient information. Following the research of both Saichaie (2011) and Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, (2015), I decided to analyse the improvisation-related pages and downloadable pdfs that are available within one click-through of the landing pages.

Initial data collection commenced in September 2016. Screenshots of the sampled ABRSM and TCL webpages were replicated using Mindview mind-mapping software. HTML versions of each page as well as the downloadable pdfs were saved as separate files and attached to the screenshots on Mindview (see Appendix E). I

conducted a second sampling of the same websites in December 2016 to explore any changes of content (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015). I included important updates to my data set, such as blog posts with improvisation assessment criteria updates.

My analysis of the document samples was utilised pencil-on-paper analysis guided by the frameworks and visual data rubric of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), and textual data rubric of Janks (2005). Combining these enabled me to analyse all sampled online and pdf documents (see Appendix B) using the same tools and scrutiny described by both and Saichaie (2011) in their research. As stated in the Case Study section of this chapter (3.2) the document analysis was effective for analysing all the research questions from the perspective of the examination boards that write the documents. In order to interrogate the research questions from the perspectives of the teaching-and-learning stakeholders, other methods were required. The next section thus uses additional methods to bring to light how exam candidates as well as their teachers and parents perceive and practice improvisation within the contexts of graded music examinations.

3.3.2 Observations and interviews.

In the last section, I developed and presented a methodological framework based on critical discourse analysis that would best enable me to answer the main research questions, how improvisation was (1) defined, (2) assessed and (3) perceived in graded music examinations. Guided by the case study (3.2), the document analysis was designed to explore the perspectives of the examination board stakeholders regarding improvisation within classical and jazz curricula of the ABRSM and TCL (3.2.1.3). A significant limitation of the document analyses was that it did not address the research questions from the perspectives of the teaching-and-learning stakeholders.

The following section therefore addresses the perspectives of the teaching-and-learning stakeholders (2.2.1) who use the documents (e.g. syllabuses, websites) in

their instrumental music lessons while preparing for a graded examination with improvisation. Guided by the case study, I designed a series of observations (3.3.2) of teacher-student-parent triads in regularly-occurring instrumental music lessons to elicit the practices of improvisation in preparation of a graded music examination. The series of observations followed three 'triads' (Davidson & Scutt, 1999) of participants consisting of a *teacher*, *student* and one *parent* weekly for two months as they prepared for a graded examination with improvisation. Observations were prefaced and concluded with interviews of the participants (3.3.2.2) to acquire ethnographic information and to allow the participants to reflect on their experiences with their improvisation exam. These data revealed the improvisation-related definitions, practices and perceptions of the teaching-and-learning stakeholders in the real-word settings as well as the tensions occurring as they interpreted the examination boards' documents in their pedagogical practices.

In addition to the interviews with the teaching-and-learning participants, I also interviewed examination board executives with the aim of gaining clarification and confirmation of my preliminary findings. Doing so brought additional credibility to my findings and allowed me to refine the outcomes to encompass reflections from all the stakeholders.

3.3.2.1 timelines of observations and interviews

My use of observations to investigate music students, teachers and parents draws from a review of related methodological literature (see Appendix H). The most salient study, Davidson and Scutt's (1999) exploration of "instrumental learning with exams in mind", investigated the interactions between 'triads' comprised of an (a) instrumental music teacher, (b) a student and (c) at least one parent of the student. Through six months of observations and interviews of instrumental music lessons before and after the ABRSM classical examinations, Davidson and Scutt found that the perceptions and interactions between teacher-student-parent triads were strongly influenced by contexts 'external' to the exams (e.g. interpersonal tensions, validations that music lessons were beneficial); particularly as the date of the

examination drew nearer. The researchers' use of observations and interviews got to the heart of the aspects of my research questions not touched by document analysis: how students', teachers' and parents' perceptions of improvisation were shaped through the process of preparing for a graded examination.

The following figure shows the timeline of observations and interviews carried out by Davidson and Scutt (1999). Observations with each participating triad (four teachers, four to five students of each teacher, one parent of each student) occurred once per month for six months (shown in green); four months before the exam and approximately two months after.

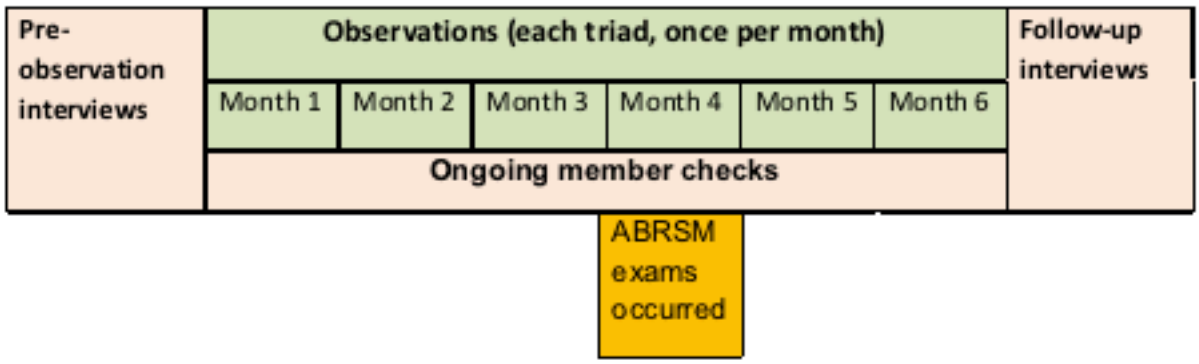


Figure 6 Timeline of Davidson & Scutt's observations and interviews.

The researchers' rationale behind this timeline was to monitor developments in pedagogical practices from the decision to register for an exam (thus capturing the rationale for doing so) and continue until two months after completing the exam (thus capturing how the exam influenced the perceptions of the examination and the interrelations of the participants).

In addition to the observation and interview timeline used by Davidson and Scutt (1999), I was also influenced by Nerland's (2007) multiple-case study of one-to-one instrumental music lessons as a cultural practice (see Appendix H). Focusing on the dialogue between three conservatory instrument teachers (string, brass & woodwind) and two students of each teacher for two months, the methods and shorter timeframe used by Nerland influenced my design because they revealed that the

quality and quantity of data that I required could be gathered through weekly observations over two months (Davidson & Scutt never stated why they chose a six-month timeline or if that was necessary/best for their data collection).

My timeline

Having reviewed the key methodological literature most relevant to my research (Appendix H), I decided to base my schedule for observations and interviews on Davidson and Scutt's (1999) study but in a shorter scale (i.e. Nerland, 2007) to match the examination schedules of my participants. I organised my observations to occur weekly within the two-month 'Easter Term' prior to the ABRSM and TCL summer exams (see Figure 7):

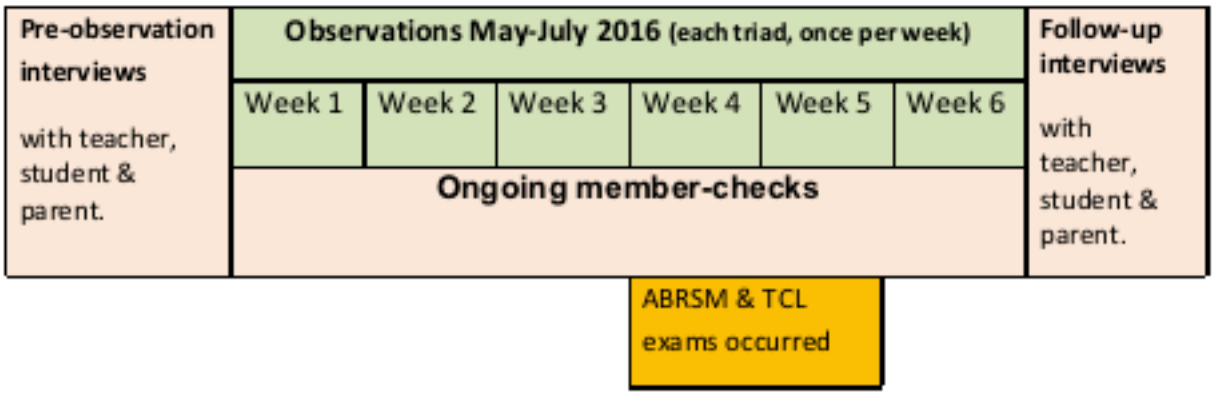


Figure 7 My observation & interview timeline schema

My timeline of 'weekly for two months' differed from Davidson and Scutt's (1999) timeline of 'monthly for six months'.[38] I decided this was justified for multiple reasons. First, Davidson and Scutt never stated the benefits or drawbacks of their timeline and it was thus unclear whether they needed six months to collect the data. Second, a key study by Nerland (2007) was able to record similar data to what I required in only two months of observations (see Appendix H). Third was that I needed to fit the data collection within my PhD research timeline. Since the exams were only offered

[38] An exact timeline of my all my observations and interviews is provided in Appendix G.

three times per year, my data collection needed to occur during the 'Spring Term' of 2016 as the candidates worked towards the ABRSM and TCL 'Summer exams'. The next available timeline would have been the 2016 Christmas exams much later in the year and a six-month span (i.e. Davidson & Scutt) would have commenced in the middle of the summer holiday when no music lessons occurred.

In total, I scheduled six hour-long observations of each triad (shown in green in Figure 7) once per week with a short 1 to 2-week break between the fifth and final observations. Gaps between the fifth and sixth observations reflected breaks in the regularly scheduled lessons due to two naturally-occurring reasons. First, many lessons that occurred immediately after the exams were cancelled due to students taking a break from music lessons. Second, the examination results and examiners' comments were not immediately available to the candidates after their exam, meaning that I needed to wait two weeks after the exams to observe how the examiners' feedback was interpreted between the participant triads during the final observations. Observing the introduction of the examiners' comments in the final lesson proved to be very important for gaining insight into tensions caused when the teaching-and-learning stakeholders had incongruent perceptions of improvisation with each other and/or with the examiners (addressed in 4.3.2).

3.3.2.2 interviews: preliminary, post-observation & member-checks

Preliminary interviews

In the weeks prior to commencing their observations, Davidson and Scutt (1999) conducted semi-structured interviews with all the participants to gather additional information. In addition to verifying the suitability of the participants to the research, the pre-observation interviews helped the researchers locate the key themes used to structure and code their observation data. 'Preliminary interviews' are regularly used in musicological research to provide ethnographic background and to alert the researcher to an array of behaviours to watch and listen for when collecting data (Shehan-Campbell, 2010). In addition, preliminary interviews can encourage reflection and discussion by prompting the interviewees to describe their musical

education, previous musical activities, and their views on the influences on their music making (*ibid*). When drawing conclusions from the analysis, preliminary interviews can help interpret the participants' negotiation of processes involved with meaning-making (Dobson, 2012, p. 83) in their musical creations and collaborations. These examples (background information, reflection and interpretation of data) strengthened my decision to use preliminary interviews to help address my third research question by extracting the teaching-and-learning participants' perceptions of improvisation.

Following on from this rationale, I designed my questions to elicit both general background information (i.e. Silverman, 2014; Creswell, 2009) as well as specific information related to the research questions such as how each participant defined improvisation (i.e. RQ1) and perceived improvisation (RQ3) within their upcoming exams. For example, ethnographic questions such as "Have you ever taken a music exam before? Will you please describe your experiences?" were followed by more-specific questions such as "How would you define improvisation?" (see questions in Appendix M). All preliminary interviews with students and parents took between 10-20 minutes. Interviews with teachers took longer (approximately 1 hour) because the exchanges of professional experiences and anecdotes elongated the conversations.

After the six months of observations, Davidson & Scutt conducted additional interviews to determine how the participants' perspectives of the exams and the other members of their triad developed during the course of the research. Having been impressed with the candid dialogue they elicited through skilful final interviews from the participants, particularly the parents and teachers, I have included similar post-observation interviews into my research timeline (see Figure 7). These interviews require consideration of the participants' perceptions and experiences with improvisation and the examinations and therefore require extra care to ask relevant formal interview questions.

Post-observation interviews

In addition to the pre-observation interviews (Silverman, 2014; Creswell, 2009), I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant after the observation timeline concluded to serve as guides to interpret the overall ethnographic journey of

the observations in relation to preparing and taking an examination with improvisation (i.e. Nerland, 2007). My initial decision to do so was prompted by the extra insight and verification gathered by Davidson & Scutt (1999) regarding how their participants' perceptions developed and sometimes changed during the research timeline.

Having been impressed with the candid dialogue the researchers elicited through skilful final interviews from the participants, particularly the parents and teachers, I have modelled my post-observation interviews on theirs but with a focus on how the participants practices, perceptions and definitions of improvisation. As demonstrated in Nerland (2007) and Davidson & Scutt (1999) formal interviews consisting of specific questions (Appendix M) drawn from individual stakeholder's experiences can elicit reflective responses and reveal a change in the participants' perceptions.

I am aware that conducting post-observation interviews raised the ethical validity of my research by allowing me to converse with the participants, answer questions and debrief the participants about the observation process such as remaindering them of how their data would be handled going forward (i.e. Silverman, 2014). This and other ethical consideration regarding interviews will be discussed further in section 0.

Member checks

In addition to preliminary and post-observation interviews, I conducted 'member-checks' (Guba, 1985) by speaking with the participants immediately prior to or after an observation when uncertainties of meaning arose or when data arising in the observations necessitated further exploration. This was prompted by Nerland's (2007) and Seddon's (2005) use of 'member-checks' in which the researchers confirmed with the participants whether had accurately described their experiences (see Appendix H). Seddon (2005) made a convincing argument that conducting member-checks strengthened his findings by allowing the participants to voice their own thoughts (2005, p. 56) and thus increased the validity of his interpretations. Recalling the point made in the opening of this chapter that generating more-convincing observation data will increase the validity of my findings (Gorard, 2013), I adopted member-checks into my own research in order to strengthening the findings

and validity, as well as to maintain high standards of research ethics by keeping the participants informed of how I was interpreting (or misinterpreting) their dialogues.

While Nerland (2007), Seddon (2005) and Davidson & Scutt (1999) all mentioned that they spoke with participants when questions, new data or new themes arose, none of these researchers provided examples of when their interpretations of the participants' experiences differed from their own. This seemed to me to be a lost opportunity to provide insight into the biases and reflexivity of the researcher. Holding this criticism in mind, my research outcomes (Chapter Four) mention when there was a difference between my interpretations and those of the participants.

Interviews with examination board executives

As detailed in the research design of this thesis (3.1), the final stage of data collection was to conduct interviews with executives from the ABRSM and TCL in order to present my findings and allow them to respond and offer a rebuttal. These interviews could be characterised as 'elite interviews' because they were with a person that was chosen specifically according to their professional position rather than randomly or anonymously (Hochschild, 2009). In this research, specific board members, namely syllabus authors from the ABRSM and TCL were interviewed to gain insight into the decision-making behind improvisation assessment (i.e. RQ 1) and how the perceptions of syllabus authors were reflected in the syllabuses (i.e. RQ 3).

The interviews followed Berry's (2002, p. 680) elite-interview recommendations that the interviewer should use open-ended questions when interviewing executives in order to allow the respondents to tell the interviewer what is relevant and important rather than be restricted to the interviewer's pre-conceived ideas about what is important. For an hour-long interview, Berry (*ibid*) recommended preparing approximately eight open-ended questions with sub-themes as well as pre-determined coding themes. Following this advice, all of my questions for the examination board executives were drawn from queries that arose from the literature review and during my research. I highlighted the eight most important questions for me to ask prior to the interviews (e.g. "Do you or your examination board have a definition of what improvisation is in context of the examinations?").

Having purposefully sampled the interviewees, I learned as much as possible about their current stances and past decisions prior to contacting them. This was prompted by Berry's (2002) advice that (1) having maximum knowledge of a participant before carrying on an elite interview avoids wasting the respondent's time and (2) knowing as much as possible maximises the richness of data gained through asking insightful questions. Adding to this second reason is advice from Hochschild (2009) that the validity can be increased by asking questions that make respondents triangulate their current and past statements and decisions (e.g. "How does what you have just said accord with your decisions when writing the improvisation tasks in the 2017 Jazz Horns syllabuses?").

All interviews with examination board executives occurred in their offices and were recorded with an audio recorder noticeably placed on the desk in front of us. All recorded data was later transcribed and analysed using the same processes of *condensation analysis* (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015) as the preliminary and post-observation interviews (see 3.3.3).

3.3.2.3 specifics: participants, sites and recording

Prior to commencing fieldwork, the participants and sites were selected following a case study screening procedure (Yin, 2006) that explored professional and personal information of potential participants through formal and informal contacts with professional music educators and examiners near Cambridge and London. Through these contacts, potential participants and sites were identified and decided upon according to their:

- experience (professional, personal and education) with improvisation;
- experience with improvisation tasks within the ABRSM and/or TCL graded examinations;
- associations with examination boards or official examination centres;
- potential richness of data for this research;
- willingness to participate in the research.

Recalling the concern about minimising the influence of a pervasive culture within music institutions (see review of Zhukov, 2013 in Appendix H) such as the influence of the ABRSM classical examination-specific culture (e.g. Wright, 2014; Tye, 2004), 'learning cultures' within the Trinity College of Music (Burt-Perkins, 2012), 'institutional values' (Froehlic, 2007) and 'cultural scripts' (Triantafyllaki, 2005) that can exist within a single music teaching institution, I concluded that the triads of observation participants should be selected from separate sites. This also reaffirms the decision to use more than one examination board in the case study design (see 3.2.1.3).

Instrument types

All but one of the key research studies listed in Appendix H observed more than one instrument type because the authors were interested in phenomena that occurs across instrument types not just not teaching issues related specifically to one instrument. This multiple-instrument approach will be adopted in my research and is reflected in the diverse instrumentation of the three triads of observation participants in my multi-case study: *flute*, *saxophone* and *trumpet* (see 3.3.2.3).

Participant selection

With these considerations, I contacted potential fieldwork sites (i.e. major music hubs and services) in Cambridgeshire through the email addresses suggested on their websites, introduced myself and explained my research. At this time, I experienced an unexpected setback in finding participants that would bring light to a new area of the investigation and raise questions for future research. My proposed research was enthusiastically met by the heads of multiple Cambridgeshire-based music services who emailed their teaching staff and later informed me that none of the teachers reported including improvisation in their regular music lessons. This indicated that either the teachers unanimously chose to ignore their employers' email, or even more troubling, that none of the music teachers employed by the county music services were including improvisation in either their peripatetic lessons in schools or in on-site music hub facilities.

This issue will be later addressed where evidence emerges that Cambridgeshire-based (and perhaps UK-based) peripatetic teachers lack the time, motivation,

support and/or training to include improvisation in their lessons (see 4.3.2). Stemming from this, students whose music education is provided in partnership with the dominant Cambridgeshire music services may likely have to pay for additional lessons with private teachers to learn improvisation. While the monetisation of music improvisation pedagogy emerged as a salient subject for future research (see 4.5.2), it had an immediate impact on the participant sample. It inferred that the sample population of students would be from economic backgrounds that could afford regular private music lessons. It also suggested that the sample of teachers would be working from private studios, their homes or the the homes of their students and thus have additional freedoms not available to peripatetic teachers in schools such as scheduling, lesson length, curriculum content and the ability to set their own prices.

When it became apparent that I would not be able to locate participants through the county music services, I changed strategies and directly searched a prominent online service where music teachers that are members of the Incorporated Society of Musicians advertise their teaching services. I began with a search for music teachers who advertised that they offered improvisation and for pragmatic reasons, were located within fifteen miles of the centre of Cambridge. Having placed telephone calls to all of the teachers to introduce myself and my research, my inquiries led to sourcing five teachers from different backgrounds that specialised in improvisation. Additional qualities that I used to refine the candidate sample were:

- Potential participants had experience with the ABRSM and/or TCL examinations as well as the improvisation options contained within;
- Potential participants had never been trained to be an examiner;
- Potential participants had ‘real world’ improvisation experience;
- Potential participants had recognised music credentials. (Four had music conservatory degrees, the fifth was from a family of musicians);
- Potential participants were preparing a student for a Summer 2016 ABRSM or TCL examination that included improvisation.

I arranged to meet with those that were potentially interested in being a participant and matched my criteria. Preliminary interviews, as described in the previous section

(3.3.2.2), were then conducted to gain ethnographic details of their teaching practices and experiences with improvisation and graded music examinations. While five suitable teachers agreed to be participants pending approval from their students and the parents, my case study design only required three participant triads. I chose to observe all five in case any participants withdrew from the research (two did withdraw before the research was completed and their data were destroyed). Details of the participants along with the schedules of their interviews and observations are presented in Appendix G.

At the outset of my research, I suspected that most examination candidates were registered for exams by private music teachers based on the ABRSM's (*2016 Annual Review*) statistic that only ten percent of the 2015-16 candidates were entered by a school music teacher. During a preliminary interview with an ABRSM syllabus executive, a request was placed for a more accurate number of exam candidates studying with "private instrumental teachers". The executive responded that it would be "around ninety plus" but exact numbers are unknown because the ABRSM is not aware of the identities of everyone that enrols for an exam. This confirmed my suspicion that private instrumental teachers, who are inexplicably under-represented in UK-based music education literature, have a strong role in shaping learning connected with graded music examinations. This also gave further strength to my decision to focus on private instrumental practice rather than school-based music lessons to address my research questions.

3.3.2.4 recording the observations & interviews

Based on the methodological literature review (Appendix H) and the practicalities of conducting actual fieldwork (i.e. being in the homes of some participants), I made the decision to be present during the observations while attempting to be less intrusive (Silverman, 2014; Creswell, 2009) by making audio-only recordings and making minimal field notes.

This decision to use an audio recorder differed from the majority of the studies in the literature review that utilised a video camera (see Table 14 in Appendix H). My rationale was that my research questions would not be better addressed through the video analyses of non-verbal communication (i.e. Mercer in Littleton & Mercer, 2012), whereas the research questions in most of the key studies shown from the methodological literature review were dependent on video. In addition, video cameras can be perceived as very intrusive by the participants thereby affecting the natural settings that I wished to observe (Silverman, 2014; Creswell, 2009). I thereby determined that using an audio recorder would work best for gathering the data that I required.

The presence of the researcher in the room during observations was determined to be necessary for two reasons, (1) making field notes and (2) minimising the influence of the researcher. Being present allowed me to make field notes regarding salient details such as significant gestures accompanying dialogue (e.g. pointing at a written line of music while talking about it) or changes to the room (e.g. music books on stands used during practices) that could be missed by a stationary video camera. The second reason stemmed from the argument that a researcher's presence can disrupt the naturally occurring event that they wish to observe (i.e. Silverman, 2014). Agreeing that there was no way to completely remove my potential influence on the participants, I attempted to minimise my presence by sitting silently in the same location throughout all of the observations (*ibid*).

Data was stored using a system adapted from Dobson (2012). All recordings were given titles that allowed the researcher to identify the event, participants and date. Using the title "1Flynn24.05.16" as an example, the first digit ("1") signifies that it was the first observation. "Flynn" is the anonymised name of the teacher in the observation. "24.05.16" is the date when the observation occurred. The numbers zero and seven were used to label preliminary ('0') and post-observation ('7') interviews. The observations procedures as outlined above were trialled in a pilot study that confirmed they were suitable for acquiring and managing my data.

3.3.2.5 additional ethical considerations

As a researcher, I am informed by both the values of my musical performance as well as my practice as a music teacher in both formal and informal settings. As an educator with a background in performance, I am sensitive to a body of criticism that music performers are untrained in pedagogy and as a result, fail to practice adequate reflection on the ethics of their teaching (i.e. Regelski, 2012). The root assumption of this criticism is that music professionals working as music teachers are loyal to the values and practices that they developed through their own formal music training, and as a result, their values are often conceptualised more in terms of music than of education (i.e. Rodriguez, 2012; Regelski, 2012). These criticisms have prompted me to routinely reflect on my values as a researcher as well as a music performer and educator and maintain a journal of my reflections.

As a music educator, I am sensitive to a body of research into the ethics of music education that criticises instrumental music teachers. The latter often assume that as members of a helping profession, their practices are ethically principled because they work on behalf of their students and follow established music traditions (i.e. Rodriguez, 2012). For example, preparing students to take graded examinations while pushing them beyond their physical and/or emotional comfort. A related body of criticism suggests music teachers might fail to state and agree to beneficial and pragmatic outcomes with the students thus making music class meaningless or an ongoing torture (Rodriguez, 2012).

Bearing these arguments in mind throughout my research, I positioned myself as a researcher that would aim to learn about but avoid criticising the values of the participant music teachers. During my observations of instrumental music lessons, I adopted 'situated' ethics practices in which I endeavoured to observe rather than guide any ethical deliberations that arose during the music lessons (Allsup & Westerlund, 2012). As stated earlier, my choices in how I would aim to be as inconspicuous as possible while observing the lessons (e.g. audio-only recordings, not talking to the participants) were shaped by my ethical decisions to minimise my impact on the participants, their interpersonal relationships and the content of their music lessons.

As all the students observed were teens and three of them received lessons in their homes, it was essential for me to speak with both the students and their parents to explain my research and seek their permission for observing and recording the music lessons. I met with all the students and parents in the sites where observations would occur where I outlined my research and explained their rights to withdraw from the research at any time. All participants were asked to read the participant information form and sign the consent form (Appendix P) to indicate their willingness to participate during the entire duration of the research and that they were comfortable with the researcher observing and documenting the music lessons. They were also made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage. As stated earlier, my presence and activity during observations was influenced by the ethics-related decisions to be as unobtrusive as possible and minimise my influence on the participants' one-to-one interactions in their personal space (see 3.3.2.4).

Special consideration was given regarding the identities of the examination boards' representatives that participated in interviews. Since there are only two examination boards being explored in this thesis, it is not possible to completely anonymise the executives with the titles 'Chief of Syllabus' or 'Chief Examiner'. Following Hochschild's (2009) advice that elite interviews align with traditional journalists' ethics and rules of engagement, I endeavoured to portray the interviewees journalistically with anonymity, in context with the complexities of their situations, without distorting their historical record and with their permission.

All elite interview subjects were made aware that I would audio record them and that 1) they could pause the recorder at any time without specifying a reason and; 2) all participants would be offered the opportunity to review transcriptions from the interview recordings audio recordings prior to the publication of this thesis (i.e. Silverman, 2014; Creswell, 2009). Any data that was not approved of by the interview participants was not to be included in the final publication of this thesis nor in any research papers or presentations.

While designing my fieldwork, it was important to be open and clear when communicating with the research participants to maintain standards of ethics and

validity (i.e. by not deceiving the participants). I therefore followed Harvey's (2011) transparency guidelines to provide the following open and accurate information to all participants: *who I am, where I am working, the nature of my research, how the data will be used, where the results will be disseminated and whether the information will be attributed or anonymous* (p. 433). All of these guidelines and how I addressed them were prepared as a concise document (Appendix P) and presented to each research participant during our initial meetings.

To further ensure my levels of ethical practices meet those with the British Educational Research Association (BERA), I compiled the following list of six ethical concerns arising from observations and interviews along with my resolutions to each:

British Educational Research Association Guidelines (2011)
1. Voluntary Informed Consent & 2. Openness and Disclosure: I obtained informed consent from all of the participants. Signatures were gathered from all participants prior to observations commencing observations. Being that BERA 's view is that it is the responsibility of the researcher to openly disclose the rationale, timeline and intended uses of this research, I personally gave all participants a letter informing them of the nature of the research and the fact that all observations will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher (see Appendix P).
3. Right to Withdraw. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time as well as that there are no consequences to the participant should they choose to withdraw. This point was expressed verbally by the researcher and in writing (see Appendix P).
4. Children and Vulnerable Young People: All music students involved were under the age of 18 and required parental consent to participate (see Appendix P).
5. Incentives: No monetary incentives were given by the researcher.
6. Detriment Arising from Participation in Research: I reminded all of the participants that the recording of music lessons might create a possibility of distress and that they therefore would be free to turn off the audio recorder at any time and would not be required to provide an explanation for doing so (see Appendix P).

Absent from BERA's list of guidelines was the topic of participant anonymity. To protect the anonymity of the participants, signed confirmations and associated recordings were kept confidential by the researcher and all names of the teaching-and-learning participants were changed. It was made clear to these participants that audio or transcribed excerpts from the recordings were kept under the researcher's control (i.e. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2007) but might appear in anonymised form in academic writings by myself or might be shown to professional audiences such as conferences. Samples of the letters that I gave to the participants can be found in Appendix P.

3.3.3 Condensation analysis of observation & interview data.

Having recorded and transcribed the text from the observations and interviews, the raw data were analysed using *condensation analysis*; a five-step qualitative method for analysing talk (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). The individual steps are provided in Figure 8 followed by a concise explanation of each with examples drawn from one of the interviews with a music examination board executive.

Condensation Analysis

1. The complete transcript of relevant material is read through to get a sense of the whole.

2. The meaning units are determined by the researcher.

3. Dominant themes in the meaning unit are restated by the researcher as simply as possible

4. Each meaning unit is interrogated in terms of the specific purpose of the study.

5. The essential (and non-redundant) themes of the transcript of the observation are tied together into a descriptive statement.

summarised from Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p. 235

Figure 8 Transcription analysis process.

Stage 1: 'Sense of the whole'

Condensation analysis begins with reading the transcripts to gain a greater sense of the whole. Brief notes are made about the main arguments and themes.

Stage 2: 'Meaning units'

The second stage of condensation analysis is to determine the natural 'meaning units'. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) define 'meaning units' as being "meaningful chunks… expressed by the subjects" and "determined by the researcher" (p. 235). The key studies from the literature review (Appendix H) neglected to state how the researchers organised the text into meaningful units with the exception of Seddon (2005), who clarified that his meaningful units were clearly discernible verbal or non-verbal communication between the participants that successfully transmitted an idea (p. 52). The sizes of Seddon's meaning units spanned from a single gesture (e.g. head tapping indicating a return to the beginning of the tune) up to seven sentences spoken by four speakers that conveyed a single agreed-upon idea (p. 54). In all Seddon's examples, I noted that meaning units conveyed meaning to the researcher as well as between the observation participants.

Based largely on Seddon's systematic analysis of verbal communication between improvisers and its success at illuminating practices of improvisation in natural settings with regards to cultural and social resources, I arrived at the following definition for the meaning units of this thesis: *clearly discernible verbal communication between the participants that successfully transmits an idea to each other as well as to the researcher*. This definition influenced my member-checks (3.3.2.2) since it prompted me to ask the participants if the ideas that were transmitted to me (with my different knowledge of improvisation and exams) were successfully transmitted to each other.

Stage 3: Themes restated concisely

During the third stage of condensation analysis, the dominant themes within the meaning units were restated as simply as possible. The following example comes from my interview with the syllabus author from the ABRSM.

Sample from data set: 01EA22.07.15				
		Dialogue	Abridged themes	Coding/ Relation to study
1	I	Can we begin with the improvisation assessment? Can you explain these tasks to me and how they are assessed by an examiner?		Examination Sections: Improv Task
2	R	So basically, we've got these little tests here. This could be a mark form. So, the examiner, because they're going to be sat at a piano for most of this exam, they're not going to be able to write huge amounts. So, they can write a little bit here, but they can't put the criteria on the mark form itself. If you put a mark of 10 let's say, they're going to know that means an uncertain and inaccurate response. That means certain errors. You might say that it was off to a good start but unfortunately came adrift further on. So basically, you've got the "extending or harmonising a melody".	Assessment task marking form explained. Examiner limited because they are sitting (& accompanying) at the piano. Assessment criteria is not on the examiner's marking form due to lack of space. An examiner can extrapolate meaning from an improvisation task score.	Examination Sections: Improv Task RQ2 RQ2: Quality assurance
3	I	Uh huh.		
4	R	And you've got corrections. They're the two basically. To test if these work, you can play examples like that to a group of examiners and if they all come to a 13 or 14, then you know this is working. If they're spread out across the whole thing, then something's going wrong (laughs). Um, so anyway, there you go. We might come back to that.	To test if assessments work, marks given by a group of examiners that have marked the same example are compared. Benchmarking is used.	RQ2: Quality assurance

Figure 9 Condensation analysis: sample data set.

In this sample (Figure 9), the identity of the speaker was indicated on the left by the letters "I" (interviewer) or "R" (respondent). The middle column contains the transcription of the dialogue recorded during an interview with an ABRSM examiner. To the right of the dialogue column, I 'condensed' the natural meaning units into abridged themes (i.e. Step 3).

Yellow and green highlighter was applied to distinguish separate meaning units within the same statement.[39] For example, the respondent's answer in Line 2 of the Figure 9 data set is separated into two meaning units: one about how the examiner is limited because they must sit at a piano (in yellow) and a second meaning unit (in green) about how examiners can extrapolate what an improvisation was like from seeing the points awarded. The colour highlighting is not a part of the standard condensation analysis described by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), but I chose to include it because the colours helped me to visually track the data.

Stage 4: Interrogation of the meaning units

The fourth step of condensation analysis involved interrogating each meaning unit in terms of relation to the study. To do so, I questioned how the dialogue and abridged themes (i.e. Stage 3) shown in the middle two columns related to the main research questions. Concise statements of the relations between the meaning units and my research questions were added to another column located on the right side of my data sets. This can be found in the Figure 9 column labelled 'Coding/ Relation to study'.

Stage 5: Themes expressed in a descriptive statement

The final stage of condensation analysis tied together the essential themes of the transcript into a descriptive statement. Keeping with the previous example (Line 2 of Figure 9), the following is the descriptive statement that I wrote that relates the respondent's statement to my second research question (i.e. How is improvisation assessed within formal graded music examinations).

[39] Highlighting text is not included in Brinkmann and Kvale's (2015) details for conducting a condensation analysis. I chose to highlight because I find that separating meaning units by alternating between yellow and green colours allows me to better visually navigate my transcription data. I personally found highlighting to be very time-consuming but well worth the effort.

Sample from line 2 of data set 0EA22.07.15	
Line 2	The ABRSM improvisation assessment tasks are impacted by the position of the examiner and the availability of space on the marking forms. Since the examiner must play the accompanying stimulus on the piano during the improvisation, they do not have the ability to write at the same time. Written comments on this task are thus made after, not during, the improvisation because the writing is impractical. In addition, there is little available space on the marking form, so the examiner has little space to write. Nor is there space for the basic assessment criteria to be stated on the marking sheets.
	Not only does the examiner determine the score, an examiner can interpret a performance by the score. In the example, a score of 10 suggests "certain errors" associated with "an uncertain and inaccurate response" meaning "it was off to a good start but unfortunately came adrift further on".

This sample above focuses in on Line 2 of Figure 9. My descriptive expressions of the data have been highlighted in yellow and green to help visually distinguish them from each other and to align the descriptive statements with the adjacent meaning units (shown in Figure 9). The descriptive statements are then used to shape the arguments and presented in the outcomes of Chapter Four.

3.3.4 Chapter summary.

Chapter Three constructed the methodology for best addressing the research questions (2.5) from the perspectives of the five key stakeholders of graded music examinations (2.2). Nesting the research within a socio-cultural framework (3.1.1), I designed a multiple-case study exploring improvisation in two cases (1) 'ABRSM' and (2) 'TCL' (3.2.1.1) with embedded units of analysis consisting of (a) classical and (b) jazz genre curricula (3.2.1.2). All were bounded within the natural settings of graded music examinations and the regular teaching-and-learning environments to specifically explore *the assessed improvisation within a genre-specific examination syllabus* (see Figure 3 in 3.2.1.2).

Drawing on prominent case study theory (3.2) and critical reviews of related literature (Appendix A & Appendix H), I selected the three most beneficial methods for collecting data: *document analysis*, *observations* and *interviews*, and refined them for my research. Table 7 provides a concise left-to-right summary of how the main research questions are addressed with specific methods and types of analysis in reference to each stakeholder:

Table 7 Methods of data collection and analysis.

RQs and Perspectives	Method	Data sources	Data Collection	Analysis
RQs 1, 2 & 3. Examination boards' perspectives	Document Analysis (3.3.1)	ABRSM & TCL syllabuses and official websites (3.3.1.1).	Improvisation-related curricula from the syllabuses and institutional websites (3.3.1.1-3.3.1.5).	Critical Discourse Analysis (3.3.1.5).
RQs 1, 2 & 3. Teaching-and-learning stakeholders' perspectives	Observations (3.3.2)	Instrumental music lessons (3.3.2.3)	Audio recordings and transcriptions. Researcher present making field notes (3.3.2.4).	Condensation analysis (3.3.3).
RQ 3. All stakeholders' perceptions	Interviews (3.3.2)	Observation triads (3.3.2.3) & Examination board executives (3.3.2.2)	Semi-structured interviews audio recorded and transcribed (3.3.2.4).	Condensation analysis (3.3.3).

To illuminate how the ABRSM and TCL define, assess and perceive improvisation in their 'Classical' and 'Jazz' examinations (i.e. my embedded case study), I conducted a critical discourse analysis (3.3.1.3) of the examination syllabuses and websites related to improvisation within the case study curricula. While this was found to be very effective at answering each research question from the perspectives of the examination board stakeholders, it was not as effective at eliciting the practices (RQ1) or perceptions (RQ3) of the teaching and learning stakeholders. To acquire the missing data, I observed teacher-student-parent triads (3.3.2.3) within the real-world settings of instrumental music lessons as they worked towards a graded examination containing improvisation. I argued that this would illuminate the

teaching-and-learning stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation (RQ3), including how they defined, practiced (RQ1) and assessed (RQ2) improvisation within the contexts of graded music examinations.

The observations were scheduled to be conducted weekly over two months (see 3.3.2.1) at regularly-scheduled music lessons. The exams occurred in approximately the fifth week of the observations. The final observations were then delayed for 2-3 weeks until the results and examiner comments sheets were sent to the candidates). This timeline of observations and interviews (see Appendix E) allowed me to successfully record how the participants pedagogical and performance practices (RQ1) were shaped and assessed (RQ2) by the examination as well as how the different (and often conflicting) perceptions of improvisation (RQ3) were negotiated between stakeholders.

To gather more ethnographic data and prominent themes that could be used when analysing the observation data, I scheduled preliminary and follow-up interviews with each participant (3.3.2.1). While the open questions of the preliminary interviews allowed me to both screen and get to know the participants, the follow-up interviews used more-focused questions based on the individual's experience to elicit more-reflective descriptions of their perceptions of the assessment of improvisation within ABRSM or TCL exams (i.e. RQ3). To ensure that the researcher's interpretations of the observed improvisation-related dialogue matched the participants' interpretations of the same dialogue, I conducted regular member-checks (3.3.2.2). Doing so helped raise the clarity, validity and ethics of the interpretation of observation data.

The final stage of the methodology was to present my questions and the main outcomes of my analyses to executives at both examination boards. This gave the boards an opportunity to reflect, clarify their positions and/or provide a rebuttal. I was thus able to explore improvisation from boardroom to classroom and back, beginning with improvisation as written in the examination curricula (*in theory*), how the syllabuses were being interpreted by students, teachers and parents (*in practice*) and then bring those findings back to key members of the examination boards for their reflections and verification.

Chapter Four: Outcomes

This chapter presents the research outcomes of the three main research questions developed at the end of the Chapter Two. All outcomes are supported with findings from the multi-case study (3.2) of the ABRSM and TCL *classical* and *jazz*-genre curricula. All data and corresponding analyses were marshalled from:

- critical discourse analysis (3.3.1.3) of the ABRSM's and TCL's improvisation-related documents (see 3.3.1.1). These analyses of the examination boards' representations of improvisation indicated how the ABRSM and TCL *defined* and *perceived* improvisation (RQs 1 & 3) as well as how *improvisation was assessed* (RQ 2);
- observations and interviews of three teaching-and-learning triads (3.3.2). The analyses illuminated the realities of preparation for graded improvisation assessments within instrumental music lessons (*ABRSM Jazz Flute, TCL Classical Trumpet, TCL Jazz Saxophone*);
- interviews with ABRSM and TCL executives (3.3.2.2). Curriculum experts were able to reflect upon questions that arose from my preliminary research findings and clarify their board's positions as well as have an opportunity to challenge my preliminary findings.

The research outcomes are organised into four main sections. The first three sections address the three main research questions and the final section connects salient themes and arguments in context with the research literature:[40]

Section 4.1 addresses the first research question: *How is improvisation defined and practiced in graded instrumental music examinations?* My argument is that the examination boards do not define 'improvisation' in their classical or jazz curricula or provide clear practices that candidates should demonstrate to examiners. This will

[40] The decision to present my outcomes in a single chapter is based on criticism of related PhD theses that concluded by segregating streams of data into multiple overly-descriptive chapters (e.g. Niknafs, 2013; Saichaie, 2011; Dumlavwalla, 2011). The analyses and interpretations of this thesis are thus presented together as 'outcomes' to maximise the presentation of more-focused arguments.

be shown to be highly problematic for achieving valid assessments of 'improvisation' due to the lack of clarity or consistent standards for what exactly the examiners are assessing. As a consequence of the examination boards' ambiguity, the teaching-and-learning participants perceived improvisation within the context of the graded examinations as being 'artificial' and thus having very little real-world validity.

Section 4.2 addresses the second research question: *How is improvisation assessed in graded music examinations?* I assert that there is no guarantee that the examiners have experience of expertise in improvisation or the contexts in which improvisation may occur (i.e. and examiner with no expertise in improvisation or jazz assessing candidates' jazz improvisations). The examination boards counter this argument by maintaining their examiners are trained to use rubrics that enable robust assessments regardless of examiners' experiences or genres. Building on the findings of the previous section, I demonstrate that the examination boards' argument is not realistic because the rubrics lack clearly defined terms, consistent language, indication of marks awarded for improvisation and/or assess jazz improvisation using rubrics or tests designed for classical music. I will conclude that it is both possible and likely that validations of improvisation awarded by examiners with rubrics that lack improvisation-specific criteria are not valid assessments.

Section 4.3 addresses the third research question: *What are the stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation in graded instrumental music examinations?* I argue that there are strong differences between the examination boards' perceptions of improvisation (i.e. as a marketable product) and the perceptions of the teaching-and-learning stakeholders (i.e. as integral to performance and pedagogical practices). It emerges that the examination boards recognise the pedagogical benefits of improvisation and are trying to provide options for teachers, however, the examination boards' efforts were not in tune with how improvisation was used by the teachers in my case study. As a result, the ongoing theme of graded examinations being perceived as a distinct (and artificial) context of improvisation is reaffirmed and reinforced.

Sections 4.4 through **4.5** tie together the key threads of argument from Chapter Four and provide a final discussion and reflection on the thesis. I conclude that the

lack of shared definitions, practices, and perceptions of improvisation weakened the validity of the assessments, making them largely without meaning since there was no consensus on what exactly was being assessed or how. In addition, I conclude that the ecological validity of the assessments was also lacking because the teaching-and-learning stakeholders perceived the improvisation tasks as being 'artificial' rather than as an accurate reflection of real-world improvisation contexts and cultures. Finally, I address the doubt raised by the case study participants that many of the ABRSM and TCL examiners are not qualified to assess improvisation because they are not experts in relevant contexts of improvisation. Weighing the examination boards' arguments that the rubrics allow all of their examiners to make valid and consistent assessments, and recalling the doubt cast on the performance rubrics that were never designed to assess improvisation, I conclude that the certifications of instrumental performance with improvisation are without meaning.

4.1 RQ 1: Definitions and Practices of Improvisation

This section addresses the first research question: *How is improvisation defined and practiced in graded instrumental music examinations?* The outcomes put forward are that the examination boards do not define 'improvisation' in their classical or jazz curricula. This is argued to be highly problematic for arriving at valid assessments of 'improvisation' because there was no clarity or consistent verbal or written standard for what was being assessed. Currently, 'improvisation' is regularly communicated in the ABRSM's and TCL's curricula and institutional websites, through corporate marketing language (Appendix D) that presents 'improvisation' as a *product* being marketed to customers (i.e. the teaching-and-learning communities) rather than as a music *practice* (2.3.2) with coherent standards.

Contrasting with the examination boards' lack of definitions and practices, the case study reveals that the music teachers had consistent definitions and practices of improvisation that were integral to their teaching practices and perceptions of improvisation. The teachers' definitions and practices were observed to be as congruent variations of the working-definition that I distilled in the literature review

(2.3.2).[41] I thus argue that the disparity of definitions and practices between the examination boards' documents and the observed teaching-and-learning practices prompted the music teachers to convey to their students that 'improvisation' within the examinations was an 'unnatural' context separate from the 'real' contexts of improvisation that occurred during music lessons and outside of graded examinations.

4.1.1 'Improvisation' within the examination boards' documents.

The ABRSM's jazz horns syllabuses

The document analysis of the ABRSM's curricula revealed that while the ABRSM did not offer options for improvisation in their standard classical-genre instrumental syllabuses, they did offer opportunities for improvisation in three sections of their jazz-genre syllabuses: *Performance*, *Quick Study* and *Aural Test*. The ABRSM's few references to their jazz improvisation practices have been gathered and are presented in the following table highlighted in bold font:

[41] 'Improvisation happens when practiced skills [i.e. replication/devices such as memorised note patterns] are spontaneously combined with cultural models [i.e. Dixieland jazz or Viennese cadenzas] and something upon which to improvise [musical frameworks]'.

Table 8 Instructions for ABRSM Jazz improvisation.

Exam sections	Textual description of improvisation (consistent across the syllabuses)	Source
Performance	'Each tune includes a fully notated head (the main melody), an indication of the feel (straight 8s or swing), **and at least one section for improvisation (solo)**.'	Jazz Horns Regulations (2017, p. 6)[42]
	'When marking, the examiner will pay attention not only to technical and rhythmic fluency but to other elements inherent in a good performance, for example: tonal variety and control, shaping and balance of phrasing, use of dynamics and accent, **and inventive and stylish improvisation**'	Jazz Horns Regulations (2017, p. 7)[43]
Quick Study	'The test is to play an unfamiliar piece of music, either from staff notation or by ear, and **to improvise a response**.'	Other Exam Elements (2017, p. 40)[44]
Aural Tests	'**To sing or play improvised answering phrases** to four two-bar phrases in a major or minor key or mode played by the examiner.'	Aural Tests (2017, p. 42)[45]

[42] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/jazzSaxophoneFull 17 Jan 2017
[43] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/jazzSaxophoneFull 17 Jan 2017
[44] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/jazzQuickStudy11.pdf 17 Jan 2017
[45] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/jazzAuralTests11.pdf 17 Jan 2017

Table 8 reveals that the ABRSM's only references to the practices of improvisation in their jazz syllabuses are conveyed through task-specific instructions that do not include guidance on what candidates should demonstrate to appease/impress the examiner. Complicating this is that the three assessment categories (*Performance*, *Quick Study* & *Aural Tests*) convey separate task-specific instructions that suggest different contexts but do not clarify if and how the candidates' practices should vary in accordance with the three tasks/contexts. For example, *Performance* requires the candidate to improvise for "one section" although does not specify what they mean by "section" (i.e. a 32-measure song form or an 8-measure break). *Quick Study* requires the candidate to repeat and improvise a response to either a written or aurally presented stimulus. *Aural Tests* requires the candidate to improvise in response to an examiner-provided stimulus. While all three tasks offered instructions of what needed to be demonstrated by the candidate (e.g. "a response", "two bar phrases", "inventive and stylish improvisation"), there were no further instructions to the candidates regarding the expected practices of improvisation for the graded assessments.

The *Performance* category of the jazz examinations, where candidates must include improvisation in a designated section of each repertoire piece (i.e. play the head and improvise for one chorus), should be the most familiar improvisation task. However, the ABRSM creates three performance categories that could be argued to add confusion. Whereas the classical syllabuses have three categories based on historical eras (i.e. Baroque & Classical, Early Twentieth Century, Contemporary),[46] the jazz repertoire have been segregated into three categories that suggest specific historical, regional and cultural performance and improvisation practices: *Blues & Roots, Standards* and *Contemporary Jazz.*[47] The syllabuses provide an opening paragraph explaining the basic rationale behind the three categories but then fail to link the key terms to any other parts of their syllabuses or marking rubrics.

[46] Retrieved from: https://us.abrsm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/syllabuses/flute0518.pdf 10 Sept 2016
[47] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/our-exams/jazz-exams/ 10 September 2016

For example, the category of *Contemporary Jazz* is introduced as representing "the vibrancy, eclecticism and even the fragmentation of jazz since the early 1970s".[48] However, after the introductory paragraph, the key terms 'vibrancy', 'eclecticism' and 'fragmentation', are not used again in any of the materials. Exam candidates are not asked to demonstrate these qualia during performance and there are no indications that examiners are marking "vibrancy", "eclecticism" and "fragmentation" when assessing musical outcomes of a contemporary jazz performance since these terms are not included in the standardized examiners marking criteria (see Appendix F). Being that the category names have little meaning (i.e. a 'Blues' can be 'Contemporary' and 'Contemporary' repertoire can contain 'Blues'), the rationale for the category labels appears to be more for wrangling repertoire from the last half-century into one group rather than as a clue to specific performance and improvisation practices.

I addressed this issue in my interview with an ABRSM syllabus author. The interviewee confirmed that these categories are contextually-based on historical eras and regions of jazz (i.e. early blues from New Orleans, Tin Pan Alley standards in New York & contemporary jazz worldwide). While that may have been the original spirit and intent of the syllabus authors, the key terms from these descriptions are not present in any other documents. Indications of how improvisation should be practiced within the Performance section of the jazz exam are thus suggested by category labels (e.g. 'Blues and Roots') but are otherwise unclear due to what Saichaie (2012) described as broken 'linkage' (see 2.4.3) between the language and intentions of the syllabus authors, examiners, and teaching-and-learning communities. This is further evidence that the validity of the examinations is weakened by the lack of clarity regarding what practices are expected by the examiners (see Johnson *et al.*, 2017 and Newton, 2017 in 2.4). In addition, it opens the door to questions about the strength of the ecological validity of the examination since the introduction of musical contexts (e.g. early blues) implies the performance exam is attempting to mirror real-world contexts. These doubts about the validities of the assessments of improvisation in the ABRSM and TCL examinations will be continuously refined and strengthened throughout the rest of Chapter Four.

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[48] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/our-exams/jazz-exams/ 10 September 2016

Improvisation with TCL jazz and classical examinations

TCL distinguishes itself from the ABRSM by offering improvisation as part of jazz *and* classical-genre assessments. Central to TCL's improvisation options is *Supporting Test 2*, a task comprised of three types of stimulus that is included in jazz and classical syllabuses. I was initially sceptical that the same test would be flexible enough to accommodate improvisation practices of jazz and classical music. However, after analysing their curricula and observing the test being prepared for in both classical (Grade 7 Trumpet) and jazz (Grade 7 Jazz Saxophone) music lessons, I surmised that *Supporting Test 2* might be the most ecologically valid improvisation assessment offered in my data sample if not for some of the ill-suited stimuli performed by the examiners.

Supporting Test 2 offers all candidates the same three testing options ('Stimulus', 'Harmonic' and 'Motivic') that draw on different real-world approaches to improvisation rather than historical or genre-specific contexts. Each option replicates common approaches to improvisation that are not specific to Western music (see Bailey 1993 in 2.3.2) and are common to many genres of music. For example, the '**stimulus**' option of *Supporting Test 2* draws upon *call-and-response*. The candidate is presented with an aural stimulus from the examiner, has a short time to prepare, and then improvises "for the specified number of repeats" to accompaniment provided by the examiner.[49] I observed this context being drawn upon in a variety of contexts including Sal and Chad's performances of the blues and in classically-focused listening games played between Troy and Tim. The '**harmonic**' option replicates *playing over harmonic changes* by requiring candidates to "improvise unaccompanied in response to a chord sequence."[50] I observed this approach to improvisation in Troy and Tim's approaches to jazz standards and Troy and Tim's approaches to improvising a classical cadenza. The '**motivic**' test replicates the approach of *building upon a theme* by requiring candidates to develop "ideas taken

[49] Retrieved from: Trinity College London Jazz Woodwind Syllabus 2017-2020 1st impression, p. 21 20 Jan 2017

[50] Retrieved from: Trinity College London Jazz Woodwind Syllabus 2017-2020 1st impression, p. 21 20 Jan 2017

from the stimulus such as a small group of notes or an interval".[51] This approach was referred to in each of the lessons that I observed.

While offering approaches to improvisation rather than replications of real-life contexts appeared to be an ecologically valid assessment, I found that the stimuli offered by the examiners during the tests had the potential to erode that validity because they were composed in specific styles that did not include jazz. The specimen pieces provided by TCL had the following titles: *March, Lullaby, Fanfare, Tango, Andante, Grazioso, Nocturne and Gigue*.[52] Being that the actual test stimuli are confidential, it was unclear to the jazz saxophone participants in my case study if they would be given a jazz stimulus for the exam or whether they would be required to demonstrate a classical practice of improvisation. My final case study observations revealed that both the TCL classical and jazz candidates were given a classical stimulus. This was a contentious issue for the jazz saxophone candidate Tim and his teacher because it was unclear what practice of improvisation was expected for the exam, a classical 'nocturne' practice, a jazz practice, or a hybrid of the two (a 'jazzy' nocturne).

By focusing on different *practices* of improvisation rather than specific *contexts* of improvisation, *TCL's Supporting Test 2* could be perceived as having the strongest ecological validity of all the musicianship tests since it focused on *approaches* to improvisation and offered a flexibility of genre-based contexts in which to apply the approaches. This gave candidates a clue as to what types of improvisation practices would be expected by the examiner. However, this was found to be true only for candidates using the classical syllabuses. As evidenced with Chad the jazz saxophone candidate, when a classical stimulus such as 'nocturne' or 'andante', which have a melody and harmony based in classical contexts, are presented to a jazz candidate, the 'authentic' approaches to improvisation would be mismatched with an incongruent stimulus from a different improvisation practice; thereby undermining the authenticity and ecological validity of the assessment.

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[51] Retrieved from: Trinity College London Jazz Woodwind Syllabus 2017-2020 1st impression, p. 21 20 Jan 2017

[52] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/site/?id=3173 20 Jan 2017

The TCL jazz performance section

The TCL jazz syllabuses contain one additional improvisation assessment, a solo within the *Pieces*[53] section of the exam (i.e. the performance section). TCL is distinctly vague about the expected practices of improvisation and as a consequence, the candidates that I observed either guessed at what was expected (e.g. Sal in 4.1.1.1) or avoided the TCL jazz examinations entirely (see Flynn in 4.1.1.1). The main idea of performing a jazz 'head' and then improvising along with a CD backing track was conveyed, but any other guidance was inadequate.

Whereas the ABRSM clearly state that each of the three repertoire pieces requires some improvisation, TCL states in each jazz syllabus that, "Three pieces are to be played… One or two of these must be a piece containing improvisation".[54] It was unclear from TCL's syllabus and institutional website what the rationale was behind giving the candidates the choice to improvise during either one or two pieces. It was unknown if it was advantageous to improvise during two pieces to show diversity or only one piece to demonstrate only the candidate's best. It was also unclear if only one piece was selected, would it be double-weighted? TCL does not state this information nor is it reflected in their performance assessment criteria.

The only clear information given to candidates regarding the expected practices of improvisation within the *Pieces* section was that there should be "a sense of spontaneity in improvisation".[55] Being that "spontaneity" does not appear in any of TCL's marking rubrics (see Appendix F) and TCL bases the validities of their assessments on their examiners' specific use of the rubrics rather than assessments drawn from individual music expertise outside of the examinations (see Saichaie in 2.4.3), it is unclear how "a sense of spontaneity" affects assessed improvisation practices within a TCL jazz examination.

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[53] Retrieved from: Trinity College London Jazz Woodwind Syllabus 2017-2020 1st impression, p. 10 20 Jan 2017

[54] Retrieved from: Trinity College London Jazz Woodwind Syllabus 2017-2020 1st impression, p. 82 20 Jan 2017

[55] Retrieved from: Trinity College London Jazz Woodwind Syllabus 2017-2020 1st impression, p. 10 20 Jan 2017

4.1.1.1 Verifying the analyses

My analysis of the curricula, syllabuses and websites of the ABRSM (jazz) and TCL (classical & jazz) revealed that despite improvisation being in the syllabuses and assessment rubrics, neither examination board defined what they meant by 'improvisation'. This was obviously problematic for both the meaning and validity of the assessments because the exam candidates and their teachers were not provided explanations or clear examples of standard definitions or expected practices when preparing for being assessed on improvisation. I therefore raised this issue in my interviews with a syllabus author from each examination board and learned that they were not overly concerned with having clear definitions and practices for their examiners or candidates. Speaking to a chief syllabus author of the ABRSM, I asked:

I: Do you or your examination board have a definition of what improvisation is in context of the examinations?

R: No, I don't think there is. No. I don't think we've defined it. In the introduction to Creative Musicianship[56] we define what we mean by that. We loosely defined it as 'thinking in sound' for our purposes. I don't think we actually have a written definition of 'what is improvisation'.

I: Have you ever been with your colleagues and said, "We should define what we mean by 'improvisation' before we write the syllabus?"

R: No. I don't think we have a literary/verbal definition.

The statement regarding how "improvisation" is at the core of a new all-improvisation syllabus was "loosely defined…for our purposes" strongly indicated that not much thought has gone into the fundamental key terms and practices of improvisation within the ABRSM examinations. Stemming from the lack of common definitions and practices within the examination board (syllabus authors, examiners), it was also verified that the ABRSM cannot provide a definition of "improvisation" to their candidates and related teaching-and-learning community. This means that all of the jazz improvisation curricula have been written and the repertoire selected (with the additional input of external consultants) without a consensus about what they mean by "improvisation" and the instruction for candidates to "improvise".

This lack of clarity strongly recalls the argument from the literature review (2.4) that examination criteria must be transparent and clearly understood because a test that fails to assess what it says it assesses is not valid (i.e. Newton, 2017). The participants in my case study provided evidence that the lack of clarity takes away from the meaning of the examinations. As Flynn explained:

> *I have never put in somebody for a Trinity jazz exam, although I like some of the books that are written for it. I have always struggled to see exactly what the examiners are after. That's partly why I don't do it. It's a bit of a shame because they go through to Grade 8, where the Associated Board ones don't. I have an adult student at the*

[56] 'Creative Musicianship' was a new curriculum under development at the time of this interview. Instead of performing repertoire, the candidates were required to improvise within specific parameters given by the examiners. The new exams were scheduled to be introduced in Winter 2017, which was too late to be included in this thesis. This is a salient topic for future research.

> *moment, and we started preparing him for the Grade 8 Trinity exam… We were trying to find an example of what exactly they wanted and there's written descriptions of what they say they're after, but it's very hard to tell what that will sound like in practice... It's kind of hard to know what they want.* [00FL01.09.16]

When preparing students for the improvisation tasks, the three teachers in my case study were unable to draw clear meaning from the examination board documents. They therefore drew upon their own perceptions of improvisation, their personal experiences with graded examinations in previous decades, and the comments left by examiners in response to other exam candidates such as current or former students. The lack of clarity in conveyance on the part of the examination boards and the subsequent inability to interpret the documents in instrumental music lessons clearly illustrates the argument that neither the ABRSM or TCL improvisation assessments were valid on the grounds that they failed to establish and clearly convey what exactly they were assessing.

In my interviews with the ABRSM and TCL syllabus authors, I asked if there were any benefits to not having any standard definitions or practices of improvisation. In both interviews, I was given similar responses affirming the examination boards were aware that there were many different perceptions of improvisation depending on genre, learning cultures and international location. Due to the varieties of practices, the boards were vague about "improvisation" because it enabled them to market their examinations to the widest possible range of candidates. While this can be viewed as an aim to be useful to a diverse spectrum of pedagogical practices, it can also be viewed as a corporate marketing narrative (see Appendix D).

Drawing from my literature review (see 2.3.2), it was found that improvisation practices are so diverse around the world that some musical cultures view 'improvisation' as a formal Western concept (Bailey, 1993) without meaning in their own improvised musical practices. This was echoed in my case study where the three teachers integrated improvisation as an organic component of their music lessons (e.g. through warm-ups or ear training exercises) as well as a distinct performance practice nested within overlapping learning and performance cultures.

The interpretation of 'improvisation' as a corporate marketing narrative echoed the nineteenth-century practice of music publishers using "improvisation" as a label to market and sell products (Love, 2003). This possibility was illustrated in the quote from Flynn (see previous page) in which he began by stating that he did not use TCL jazz exams with his students because the improvisation components were unclear, but that he did like and use some of the books specifically published by TCL as ancillary products to accompany their improvisation syllabuses. The evidence that the examination boards communicate improvisation as a product rather than as a practice will form a key part of section 4.3.1 when I detail the perceptions of improvisation by the examination boards (RQ3).

4.1.2 Definitions & practices of "improvisation" in instrumental music lessons.

This section addresses how improvisation is defined and practiced in the ABRSM and TCL examinations (RQ1) from the perspectives of the teaching-and-learning communities. Outcomes from my analysis of the three teacher/student/parent participant triads (3.3.2.3) will be used to further develop the arguments introduced in the previous section (4.1.1). It will be shown that all three teachers had well-considered definitions and practices of improvisation that they conveyed through their teaching practices. While the teacher's definitions and practices differed slightly, they shared core principles that they believed were absent in the ABRSM and TCL examinations.

The following table condenses the definitions and practices of improvisation as expressed by each of the teachers from my observations. The contents will be unpacked to reveal their consonance of the participants' perceptions and how these can clash with the suggested practices of the ABRSM and TCL examinations:

Table 9 Teachers' definitions and practices of improvisation.

Teacher	Definition of improvisation	Practices of improvisation	Rationale behind improvisation practices
Sal TCL Jazz Saxophone	"Real" improvisation was the practice of combining music devices/ideas in context.	The creative use of devices within a theoretical framework (e.g. a chord schema) in contextual "structures" (i.e. the bridge in a 32-bar song form) rather than a display of memorised material.	A way to "take ownership of music using a theoretical framework".
Troy TCL Classical Trumpet	"Creating music live and in context" with an emphasis on using "the ear" to take part in musical dialogue.	Improvisation is dialogical and combines critical listening with broad contexts (i.e. genre, style and era) and narrow contexts (e.g. tone production).	To develop "the ear" to comprehend, interpret and respond to music.
Flynn ABRSM Jazz Flute	"Spontaneous composition" in which "something is being contributed by the performer to the composition"	Telling a story while adding to the music something that was not there before. Strategies are used for combining musical devices and applying them to larger structures.	A way of telling a story that contributes something that was not there before.

Exemplar 1: TCL Jazz Saxophone Grade 7

In my interviews and observations of jazz saxophone lessons, the teacher Sal valued improvisation as a way to "take ownership of music using a theoretical framework". He defined improvisation as a practice of "formalising" (providing structure & context) of musical ideas/devices. In practicing improvisation, Sal utilised what he called "an ideas template" (see Appendix E) consisting of improvisation "devices" that could be combined as fundamental music building blocks. For example, a simple arpeggio can be part of multiple devices such as "highlighting chord tones", "using upper-structure triads", "beginning arpeggios from the third of the chord" and "transposing arpeggio patterns to different chords" (all in Appendix E). By themselves, the performing these arpeggio-related "devices" were not considered to be "really improvising". "Real" improvisation was the practice of combining the devices in context.

In his teaching practice, Sal dispelled the "mystical" "ambiguity" and "totally unstructured" accounts of the practice of improvisation presented in the TCL examination curricula. In the lessons that I observed he clearly conveyed

improvisation as the creative use of devices within a theoretical framework (e.g. a chord schema) in contextual "structures" (i.e. the bridge in a 32-bar song form) rather than a display of memorised material.

> *It's not mystical [improvisation]. It's something that can be highly-structured and spelled-out, particularly when it comes to students… You can teach to the exam criteria and the musicians will learn absolutely nothing. It will be effectively useless for them to being doing it. I try to teach so they understand where the scales come from in a creative context, so they own it. They take ownership of their learning.*

A key insight here, shared by all of the observed teachers, was that memorising the basic "exam criteria" such as grade-specific scales and arpeggios associated with improvisation (e.g. modes & pentatonic scales) was considered to be insufficient ("effectively useless") for improvisation (to "take ownership of music").[57] This is significant for both the first and second research question (*How is improvisation assessed…?*) because it reveals an understanding of improvisation practices (and assessment) that might not be held by musicians without improvisation experience; that the case study experts all believed that there were lower and higher levels of improvisation practices in which demonstrating skills is much lower than combining separate skills in context.

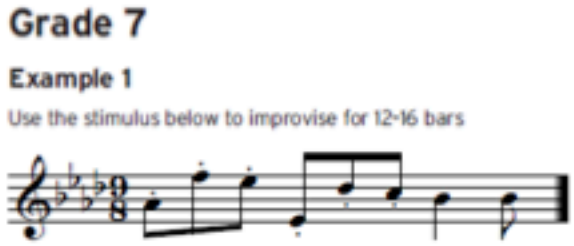
Exemplar 2: TCL Classical Trumpet Grade 7

The trumpet teacher (Troy) valued improvisation as a way of developing "the ear" (i.e. abilities to aurally comprehend, interpret and respond to music) and defined improvisation as "creating music live and in context". In the lessons that I observed, Troy stressed critical listening as key to the practice of improvisation. Troy and his student Tim had ongoing discussions about the techniques, tones and styles of improvisation as well as the historical contexts of the trumpet role models in the recordings. Improvisation was heightened by the aural development in broad contexts (i.e. genre, style and era) and narrow contexts (e.g. tone production). When

[57] This is an important theme that will be further examined in section 4.3 as it directly relates to the perceptions of the teaching-and-learning stakeholders that improvisation requires more learning and broader theoretical knowledge than the examinations without improvisation; an assertion disputed by the examination boards.

teaching Tim to improvise, Troy repeatedly expressed that technical skills (i.e. scales and arpeggios) in addition to and short melodic phrases (i.e. licks) were useful "tools" that needed to be taught and practiced regularly. Troy clarified that "It was important not to just feed him a bunch of licks, but to try and get him to develop his ear. To hear".

Tim chose to do the *motivic* stimulus option for his TCL *Supporting Test*[58] because he was stronger melodically than harmonically (the motivic test has no chord changes). Preparing for the exam, Troy was unsure exactly of what the examiners would be listening for since the syllabus is vague about the expected practices of improvisation (see 4.1.1): The sample stimulus was recognised by all the trumpet participants as being brief and lacking in helpful details:[59]



> *It's tricky and there is not a lot to go on as to what they are looking for. They might want to see the things you can do with the instrument; alternative fingerings, flutter-tongue… without necessarily talking about creating a sense of melodic or rhythmic interest. Even dynamics are slightly missing from the examples. I'm just trying to teach him [Tim] that sort of thing that he can apply to any other form of music. Rhythmic and harmonic contrast. Any of those kinds of ideas.* [00Troy09.05.16]

Since Troy could not draw specifics about improvisation from the TCL syllabus or assessment criteria, Troy drew from past examiners' comments about articulation and dynamics and suggested that Tim highlight the contrast between the staccato and non-staccato notes as well as add dynamic contrasts since no dynamics are

[58] As presented in the section 4.1.1, the 'Motivic' option of *Supporting Test 2* requires the candidate to develop a theme presented by the examiner.
[59] Retrieved from http://www.trinitycollege.com/site/?id=3173 on 14 Jan 2017

provided. This exposition of technical abilities differed strongly from the practices of improvisation that Troy maintained drew upon the ear to respond to respond to what was hear by "creating music live and in context". The trumpet participants did come to recognise that the Grade 7 *Motivic* improvisation test was a specific musical context, thereby fitting Troy's "creating music live and in context" mantra, however the lack of aural engagement (i.e. critical listening and response) left a firm impression on Troy that the assessment task was not "real improvisation"; an impression that he passed on to his student.

Exemplar 3: ABRSM Jazz Flute Grade 5

The flute teacher (Flynn) viewed the practices of improvisation as different ways of telling a story that contributed something that was not there before. Flynn defined improvisation as "spontaneous composition" in which "something is being contributed by the performer to the composition". Like Sal, Flynn explained that the practice of improvisation was widely and incorrectly thought of as being unstructured, with performers "always having to come up with something fresh and new". Also, in agreement with the other teachers, Flynn argued that the practice of improvisation was highly-structured with definite theories, histories and strategies. Overall, the practice of improvisation needed to tell a story while adding to the music something that was not there before. Successful storytelling was accomplished through employing "strategies" for learning song structures and improvising over chords. This reinforces the recent point that the teachers view improvisation as having different layers, with combining strategies being much higher than a display of memorised skills.

Flynn also perceived that the practices of improvisation within the context of graded music examinations were different than those occurring in real-life contexts. He spoke of special strategies for presenting to an examiner "the things the examiner is listening for" and how these differed from the broader contexts of improvisation practiced outside of examinations. For example, when his student asked about the "F 6/9" chord in the repertoire piece "Fotografia", he explained broadly and then in the narrow context of the exam:

> *It's a bright chord that doesn't use the major seventh. So, it's bright but a*

little softer than a major seventh chord. Pastel, rather than oil. They are common in country music actually and when someone wants to end on a bright, slightly-unresolved finish… [03Flynn07.06.16]

After that description, Flynn narrowed his explanation to the practice of improvisation specifically within the examination. He drew on feedback from his students' previous examinations results to instruct Heather on what he believed the ABRSM examiners want to hear during the examination:

Flynn: *Basically, anything from an F major scale will work here… A good trick is to have it build up to a high note, so if you can play a bit of a scale or arpeggio or both and finish on the 9 or 6, which are G and D, you will have that bright finish they [the examiners] want.*

Heather: *[She improvises using an F scale and finishes on a held G].*
I'm not sure what I'm doing.

Flynn: *For the exam, that's perfect. You just need to show some movement and end on a high note. [03Flynn07.06.16]*

As with the other exemplars, the music teacher is unsure of the practices of improvisation within the graded examination (since little is provided in the syllabus) and makes suggestions based on demonstrating specifics based not on the examination criteria, but on the experience of reading brief feedback left by examiners from past examinations.[60]

4.1.2.1 comparing definitions and practices from the student/teacher/parent triads

When teaching and learning improvisation, all three triads engaged in a practice that Sal termed "replication and formalisation". *Replication* included the memorization of

[60] I later asked Flynn about these comments during a member–check and he explained that he has combined examiners' comments with students' recollections over the years to fill in the gaps not provided in the syllabus regarding improvisation. Interested in this comment, I asked the other music teachers (Sal & Troy) if they have done this and both confirmed "Yes", that the feedback that comes after the examinations provides more information about improvisation than the syllabus and institutional websites.

scales, arpeggios and melodies located within the examination syllabus. In addition to the notated materials, all three teachers encouraged their students to develop their ears through critically listening to role-model performers (e.g. Charlie Parker, Chet Baker, Dave Valentin) to study their tone, phrasing and articulation, as well as transcribing favourite melodic phrases from the recordings. The students were thus encouraged to go beyond learning the notes and rhythm of the solos and to match the phrasing and tone of the original artists as well.

After 'replication', the next stage in practicing improvisation was to 'formalise' memorised music passages (e.g. an arpeggio or a transcribed improvisation) by applying them to a theoretical framework. With Sal and Chad, this was accomplished using their 'ideas template' of improvisation devices (see Appendix K). Troy and Tim did not use the term "formalising" but used nearly identical descriptions of how to develop memorised patterns using music theory and a list of contrasts (i.e. melodic, rhythmic, articulation) that would be recognisable to an examiner. Flynn and Heather used the arpeggios and scales from their Grade 7 syllabus to improvise in increasingly larger forms starting with a two-bar sequence and expanding their framework to the entire form of a song.

A key concern and difference of the music teachers related to how they valued the practices of improvisation. All aligned their practices with specific goals. For example, Sal most valued improvisation as a practice because it enabled musicians to take ownership of the music. Troy valued improvisation as a practice for developing the ear. Flynn valued the practice of improvisation to tell a story and contribute something new that did not exist before. In the lessons, I consistently observed that the teachers made the practice of improvisation align with their pedagogical and performance goals. I also observed that tensions were often present when preparing for the examinations because the goals of the teachers regarding the practices of improvisation did not align with those of the graded music examinations.

4.2 RQ 2: Assessing Improvisation

This section addresses the second research question: *How is improvisation being assessed in graded instrumental music examinations?* (2.5). The arguments have been organised through the framework of 'assessment for qualification and certification' (see 2.4), meaning that assessment will be addressed in three stages: *pre-defined standards* (i.e. curricula), *the qualification of the awarding bodies* (i.e. examiners' improvisation-specific expertise) and the *meanings communicated by the certification/diploma*.

Analysis of the curricula and assessment procedures reveals that when assessing improvisation in the *Performance* sections of examinations, TCL examiners use marking rubrics that were not specific to improvisation to assess improvisation and the ABRSM examiners used rubrics designed for non-improvisation with a few inconsistent references to improvisation. I argue it is not clear from the rubrics how marks specifically awarded by the examiners for improvisation affect the overall examination scores. Moreover, the examination boards' use of these rubrics to assess improvisation does not correspond to how the instrumental triads that I observed assess improvisation or believed how improvisation was being assessed in the examinations.

Placing these outcomes in the *assessment for qualification and certification* framework, I will argue that the diplomas communicating competence are awarded through an assessment process mired in multiple stages of mystery and highly problematic assessment practices. It will be shown that there is a paucity of specific and consistent improvisation assessment criteria concerning improvisation and that through a chain of deficiencies (insufficient pre-defined standards, examiners not qualified to validate improvisation, uncertainty of what the qualification actually means), the assessments of improvisation in the ABRSM and TCL examinations range from highly questionable to meaningless.

4.2.1 Assessments for qualification: two theories for graded music exams.

In Chapter Two, it emerged that research literature on the assessments occurring in graded music examinations are wholly summative (Ross, 2009; Mitchell, 2012; Babin, 2005; Tye, 2004; Salaman, 1994). While I accepted these conclusions, I put forward that 'summative' was an insufficient categorization because there was a potential for (a) the *formative use of summative assessment* (Fautley, 2008) when examiners' comments and exam results were used formatively in music lessons after the examination; and (b) *assessment for qualification and certification* (Dufaux, 2012) in which exam candidates are awarded a diploma by an authoritative body that communicates a specific set of competencies.

Formative use of summative assessment

Regarding the *formative use of summative assessment*, I found that the teaching-and-learning communities that I observed had a desire to use the examiners' improvisation-related feedback formatively in their lessons but were unable because the comments (Appendix L) were either illegible (e.g. TCL Jazz Saxophone), used unhelpfully vague language (e.g. ABRSM Jazz Flute) or did not use language and terms consistent with the marking rubric (e.g. TCL Trumpet). For example, Tim, the TCL Trumpet candidate's improvisation received only one brief comment on his improvisation, *"Excellent use of the full range of the instrument"*. This comment was puzzling because "range" is not in the improvisation marking rubric and the observation participants did not assess improvisation according to "use of the full range of the instrument".

Contrasting with this, Tim received more-specific comments on the section without improvisation that matched the rubric criteria: *"Well executed attacks shaped the overall phrases effectively. Good sense of rhythmic and articulation contrast. Excellent tone"* (Appendix L). This suggested that the examiners were somehow hindered from making comments that were as constructive with the improvisation tasks as with the tasks without improvisation (i.e. the vast majority of what they examine).

Drawing on Saichaie's (2012) description of 'linkage', the important practice of an examiner linking their comments to the marking rubric (see 2.4.3), the disparity between the superficial/unrelated improvisation comment versus the more-thorough syllabus-related non-improvisation comments reveals an important consequence of the assessment practices of graded music examinations; the failure to have clear and meaningful improvisation rubrics results in a failure to have clear and meaningful examiner comments. Stemming from this, teachers were not able to use summative assessments formatively in any of the music lessons that I observed.

Assessment for qualification and certification

Assessment for qualification and certification recognises examinations as a high-stakes venture for the candidates with real-life consequences for the teaching and learning stakeholders involved (Au, 2007). The outcomes of graded music examinations can impact the student's future engagement with music, such as whether they continue with lessons, take a break, or progress to study music as part of their higher-education (*ibid*). Outcomes may also have consequences for the relationships between the teacher-parent-student triad or between the teachers and their schools (Davidson & Scutt, 1999).

To meet these expectations, valid and meaningful *assessments for qualification and certification* should be comprised of pre-defined standards and achievements to test candidates and award official recognition of their examination-specific competencies (Dufaux, 2012, p. 7). The 'qualification' is the formal recognition of learning built upon pre-defined standards that is typically part of a qualification framework consisting of levels/ranks that are determined and maintained by an official body (Dufaux, 2012). 'Certification' (4.2.4) is the official document that records the qualifications directly related to the candidate's demonstrated skills at a specific level (*ibid*). A certification (e.g. a Grade 7 Jazz Saxophone diploma) allows the candidate to communicate their qualification-specific competencies (see 4.2.4) and also proceed vertically to a higher qualification (Dufaux, 2012, p. 8) such as the next grade.

As a formal recognition of learning, improvisation within a qualification would be reliant on (a) pre-defined standards maintained by a competent body and (b) recognition that the candidate has achieved those standards by a competent body

(Dufaux, 2012). To address the current tensions found within each of these points, I will use findings from the document analysis to argue that the lack of pre-defined standards, such as not having standard definitions of 'improvisation' (see 2.3), call to question the robustness of an ABRSM or TCL qualification. The outcomes of the arguments are particularly condemning of improvisation as assessed in the ABRSM's jazz syllabus because of the thoroughly inconsistent use of key terms throughout the ABRSM marking rubrics (see 4.2.2.2). Contrasting with the ABRSM, TCL will be shown to be largely consistent in their use of key terms but unclear regarding exactly what the key terms mean (see 4.2.2.1), resulting in differing perceptions of improvisation and its assessment.

Concerning the second point, that the candidates' achieved standards must be recognised by a competent body, I will argue that the official body (examiners and syllabus authors) might not be qualified to recognise specific standards of improvisation (4.2.3). This argument is supported with evidence from documents and interviews that an ABRSM or TCL examiner providing the formal recognition might not be a specialist in improvisation or the specific genre (jazz or classical) and that all of the ABRSM and TCL examiners assess improvisation in the *Performance* sections of the exams with rubrics that were not designed to assess improvisation.

4.2.2 Insufficient pre-defined standards for improvisation.

Beginning with TCL and followed by the ABRSM, this section further develops arguments that as a result of the lack of clear definitions and practices of improvisation provided by the examination boards, clarity or consensus could not be achieved by the teaching-and-learning stakeholders regarding what was being assessed in the examinations (see 4.1.2.1). I will argue that the lack of coherent pre-defined standards of assessment generate doubt and tensions regarding how the examiners assess something that their boards have not defined. Moreover, the examination boards mask the lack of validity their improvisation assessments with credibility generated from their historical reputations, institutional prestige and ancillary publications.

4.2.2.1 TCL's pre-defined standards for improvisation

My analysis of TCL's classical and jazz assessment documents found few references to improvisation. The two clearest references consisted of (a) an instruction in every jazz syllabus that candidates may choose either one or two pieces in which to improvise and (b) a notification that improvisation allows "candidates to express their own musical identities through options to improvise".[61] The first reference, that of the three jazz performance pieces, candidates should improvise during either one or two of them, I raised as possible cause of confusion in section 4.1.1 because there were no indications of how this choice affected a candidate's assessment. This issue did arise during my observations of the jazz saxophone lessons in which the student Chad asked his teacher if it was "better" to improvise in two pieces to show diversity or improvise in only one piece to show his best and hide the two pieces in which his improvisation was weaker. The student also questioned whether improvising over one piece was then double-weighted to match a performance with two improvisations. The teaching-and-learning triad were not able to arrive at an accurate conclusion due to the lack of pre-defined standards within TCL's 2017 jazz assessment regulations.

The second reference, which encourages "candidates to express their own musical identities through options to improvise",[62] might initially be encouraging to read from the perspective of the improvisers, is problematic for the assessment because it suggests that the standards that the examiners will be assessing relate to the candidates' "own musical identities". Combing this issue with the reality illustrated by Saichaie (2012, see 2.4.3) that examiners make assessments based on qualities that they hear during the performance and do not engage with the candidates' musical identities beyond the space for improvisation strictly indicated in the syllabuses[63], it is doubtful that TCL's single reference to improvisation assessment

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[61] TCL Jazz Woodwind Syllabus, 2017-2020, p. 11.
[62] TCL Jazz Woodwind Syllabus, 2017-2020, p. 11.
[63] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.com/site/?id=1046 9 Feb 2017

within the *Pieces* category (i.e. “candidates are to express their own musical identities”) can be realistically met within the current assessment framework. The candidates' “own musical identities” may be encouraged by the syllabus and an appealing line in the board's marketing materials (i.e. Appendix D), but in practice “own musical identities” are not a part of the TCL performance assessment rubric and therefore not directly assessed by the examiners.

Drawing on my definitions of documents as social tools shared between participants that actively shape their meanings (see 3.3.1), I would argue that Trinity College's encouragement of “own musical identities” is more of a social construct rather than a fixed standard. Supporting evidence was provided by the TCL jazz saxophone lessons in which I recorded examples of how a student's “own musical identities” were transferred from the student/candidate to the examiner. For example, the jazz-saxophone participants (Sal and Chad) viewed the performance-section improvisation assessment not as an opportunity for the candidate to express their “own musical identities”, but rather as a special context in which the candidate had to interpret the expected “musical identities” of the examiner. Performance strategies were discussed between the candidate and teacher in regard to how to discern through brief dialogue whether or not the examiner had an interest in improvisation and/or jazz and how to effectively perform to those perceived expectations. When the pre-defined standards of the candidates “own musical identities” met with the reality of the assessment, they acquiesced to the perceived musical identities of the examiner rather than aligning with a fixed pre-defined standard necessary for a robust assessment for qualification (i.e. Dufaux, 2012).

Supporting Test 2

In section 4.1.1, I stated that TCL's *Supporting Test 2* was unique among the assessments because the same test and rubric were given to classical and jazz-genre examinations. Trinity College accomplished this by offering candidates a choice between three methods of improvisation (*motivic*, *harmonic* & *stylistic*) rather than giving them an artificial improvisation task modelled on a pre-existing non-improvisation test. However, I also found fault in the sample stimuli presented by the examiners since they only included classical tunes and none appropriate jazz candidates taking the exact same test.

Turning attention to assessment, my document analyses revealed that TCL highlights and markets the design of this test on their website and touted that by assessing a candidate's improvisation in their choice of one of three available categories, they were able to provide a more "musically authentic" test than their competitors.[64] Being that the three improvisation options provided minimal references to how the candidates would be assessed, I doubted validity of the assessment while at the same time generally supported TCL's assertions that *Supporting Test 2* was more "musically authentic" than the improvisation tests offered by their rival, the ABRSM. The key difference is that while the assessment may lack validity (i.e. vague rubric), there is a stronger sense of ecological validity since the test draws on real-world approaches to improvisation.

The *Supporting Test 2* options, whether in jazz or classical genres, are all assessed using the same rubric. That rubric is entirely different from the rubric used to assess the performance section (see Appendix F). The *Supporting Test 2* rubric has only one column and has the word 'improvisation' stamped at the head of it. Improvisation is assessed in that column with three consistent descriptors within each band: 'creativity and imagination', 'musical structure' and 'fluency of response'. This is a significant contrast with the TCL *Performance* rubric (Appendix F), which is labelled 'Classical & Jazz' at the head and contains no improvisation-specific assessment criteria. This suggests that the *Supporting Test 2* rubric, while vague, is still more valid for assessing improvisation than the performance rubric, which contained no references to improvisation.

Despite the consistency of language within the separate bands of the *Supporting Test 2* rubric (e.g. "An *excellent* sense of musical structure", "a *good* sense of musical structure", "a *generally reliable* sense of musical structure"), the key terms in the three assessment categories (e.g. 'musical structure', 'creativity & imagination') are not pre-defined and can thus be perceived differently by each stakeholder. For example, there are five levels of 'creativity & imagination' but no definition or distinction between 'creativity' and 'imagination' is not provided in TCL's documents.

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[64] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.com/news/viewarticle.php?id=463 9 February 2017

Being at a loss for a clear understanding, I raised this point with the TCL executive during our interview. The executive could not clarify why both terms are used, what each meant or how they differed.

Within the framework of *assessment for qualification and certification*, having pre-defined standards in place that are clear to all of the stakeholders are necessary for a robust and valid qualification (Dufaux, 2012). The lack of definitions in the board's documents (see 4.1.1.1) and the inability of the TCL executive to add clarity thus casts further doubt on the validity of the improvisation assessments and challenges the robustness of an assessment in which each examiner or syllabus author may have a different understanding of the key terms and rubric categories.

4.2.2.2 the ABRSM's pre-defined standards for improvisation

Whereas the last section detailed the shortage of pre-defined standards in TCL's improvisation assessments, this section addresses the pre-defined standards of the ABRSM. I will argue that while the ABRSM does include references to improvisation in their three marking rubrics, each contains different improvisation-related language, often within the same rubric. Improvisation is thus communicated differently *within* and *between* the three rubrics (*Performance*, *Aural Test*, *Quick Study*) which weakens the meaning of each assessments.

To the ABRSM's credit, they have included definitions of the five key terms/categories used as headings of the marking rubric columns on their institutional website.[65] However, the descriptors under those headings are riddled with inconsistencies suggesting that the standards of assessment within each rubric have not been robustly considered, had their meanings defined or been communicated through the use of clear consistent language.

[65] Retrieved from: https://gb.abrsm.org/en/exam-support/your-guide-to-abrsm-exams/how-we-mark-exams 10 Jan 2017

TUNES	Pitch	Time	Tone	Shape	Performance
Distinction 27-30	• Highly accurate notes and intonation • Solo has stylish and inventive note choices • Improvisation shows harmonic awareness	• Fluent, with flexibility where appropriate • Rhythmic character and feel well conveyed throughout • Convincing groove in the improvisation	• Well projected • Confident use of jazz tonal qualities	• Expressive, idiomatic musical shaping in the Head • Solo has authentic detail	• Assured • Fully committed • Vivid communication of character and style • Idiomatic embellishment
Merit 24-26	• Largely accurate notes and intonation • Solo has controlled note choices • Coherent improvisation	• Sustained, effective tempo and groove • Good sense of rhythm and feel throughout • Controlled rhythmic placement in the improvisation	• Mainly controlled and consistent • Good jazz tonal awareness	• Clear musical shaping in the Head • Solo has some expressive variety	• Positive • Carrying musical conviction • Character and style communicated • Effective embellishment
Pass 20-23	• Generally correct notes and intonation • Solo has some contour	• Suitable tempo • Overall rhythmic accuracy and correct feel • Generally stable placement in the Solo	• Generally reliable • Adequate jazz tonal awareness	• Some realisation of musical shape and/or detail	• Generally secure, prompt recovery from any slips • Some musical involvement • Embellishment attempted
Below Pass 17-19	• Frequent note errors and/or unreliable intonation • Solo lacks contour	• Unsuitable and/or uncontrolled tempo • Irregular pulse and groove • Inaccurate rhythm and/or incorrect feel	• Uneven and/or unreliable • Inadequate jazz tonal awareness	• Insufficient musical shaping	• Insecure, inadequate recovery from any slips • Insufficient musical involvement • Ineffective or no embellishment
13-16	• Largely inaccurate notes and/or intonation • Solo lacks coherence	• Erratic tempo and/or rhythm • Groove and feel not established	• Serious lack of tonal control	• Musical shaping largely unrealised	• Lacking continuity • No musical involvement
10-12	• Highly inaccurate notes and/or intonation • Solo very incoherent or absent	• Incoherent tempo and/or pulse • Groove and feel absent	• No tonal control	• No shape	• Unable to continue for more than a short section
0	• No work offered	• No work offered	• No work offered	• No work offered	• No work offered

Figure 10 ABRSM jazz performance rubric.

In the ABRSM's 2017-2020 jazz marking rubric (shown above), I have place grey rectangles around the specific references to improvisation. Comparing the ABRSM's jazz rubric to their classical rubric, it is obvious that the jazz rubric is identical except for the addition of the boxed references to improvisation. It is therefore alarming that the boxed references are inconsistent in language ('solo' and 'improvisation' used interchangeably), placed sporadically ('solo' appears in only two bands of the 'Shape' category), lack consistent scale ('contour' ranges from 'lacks' to 'some' before being dropped from the higher bands under 'Pitch'), or invite unknown contexts ("Solo has *authentic* detail"). The ABRSM's standards for assessing improvisation in jazz performances are shockingly deficient.

Looking at the standards individually, a consistent concern is that the descriptors are ambiguous about whether they refer to improvisation or the notated melody. For example, while the category of 'tone' is defined on the ABRSM's website, it is unclear if improvisation is assessed under that heading because the descriptors refer

only to ‘jazz’ (e.g. “jazz tonal qualities”) but never refer directly to ‘improvisation’. Most surprising to Troy, the ABRSM trumpet teacher that I interviewed, was that the ‘performance’ category contained no direct references to ‘improvisation’ or ‘solo’. Troy’s perception was that it was “bizarre” to assess improvisation by ‘pitch’ but not by ‘performance’. In response, I asked the ABRSM syllabus author in our interview about whether ‘embellishment’, which is included under the ‘performance’ category, could ambiguously include improvisation. The syllabus author confirmed that ‘embellishment’ typically refers more to ornamentation (e.g. baroque and classical trills and turns) than to improvisation within the context of jazz performance.

The fact that ‘improvisation’ within the Performance section of the examinations is not assessed within the category of ‘performance’ is significant because it provides an example of how the ABRSM’s assertion that they assess “musical outcomes” rather than the technique is carried out in practice.[66] Through this, the ABRSM minimises the relevance of having pre-defined terms for assessing improvisation as well as the active process of performing and improvising in order to highlight the examiners appraisal of a final “musical outcome”, a product that the ABRSM perceives as distinct from the processes and pre-defined terms that generate it.

Further indicating the lack of pre-defined standards, the two categories that directly refer to ‘improvisation’ (‘pitch’ and ‘time’) offset the word against the word ‘solo’ inferring that the two have an important but unexplained distinction. ‘Improvisation’ appears comparatively elevated in the highest two bands (Distinction and Merit) of the ‘pitch’ and ‘time’ categories whereas ‘solo’ spans down to the lowest Below Pass bands. This initially suggests that ‘improvisation’ is defined as a higher skill than ‘solo’. However, such an argument would be muddled in further confusion. For example, both terms are used within ‘pitch’ category to describe different phenomena. The Distinction category of ‘pitch’ states "Solo has stylish and inventive note choices” next to “Improvisation shows harmonic awareness”. The band beneath that (Merit) states “solo has controlled note choices” whereas the paired reference to improvisation no longer alludes to “harmonic awareness” but instead gives the vague

[66] ABRSM defines the ‘Performance’ rubric category as “overall command of the instrument or voice, involvement with the music, musical communication”. Retrieved from: https://gb.abrsm.org/en/exam-support/your-guide-to-abrsm-exams/how-we-mark-exams/ 10 Jan 2017

descriptor, “Coherent improvisation”. Adding to the evidence for a lack of clear standards, the term ‘solo’ is used in the top two bands of the ‘shape’ category while ‘improvisation’ is not included under the category of ‘shape’.

The ABRSM Musicianship Tests

It is both surprising and unsatisfactory that no explanation is provided regarding the differences between ‘improvisation’ and ‘solo’. This issue gets more convoluted when compounded with the lack of clear definitions and language used in the documents of the two ABRSM ‘musicianship tests’ (Aural Test & Quick Study). Briefly stated, the Quick Study corresponds to the traditional sight-reading tests of most classical exams. Candidates are given a musical stimulus and time to prepare before they improvise an assessed ‘response’. The Aural Test is related to the classical interval and rhythm tests. The candidate responds to the “overall texture” of notes and rhythms provided by the examiner’s piano playing.[67]

The pre-defined standards of improvisation in both musicianship tests are incoherent for multiple reasons. First, both tests use different terms to refer to improvisation than used in the Performance rubric (which were ‘solo’ & ‘improvisation’). The Aural Test uses ‘response’ whereas the Quick Study uses “improvised answer” resulting in the sporadic use of four separate undefined terms across the rubrics. Second, the Musicianship Tests use single-column rubrics whose headings are the name of the test rather than the ABRSM’s five elements of music used in the Performance rubric (see Appendix F) to separate the categories of assessment. This results in the unexplained loss of the established categories based on elements of assessment and obfuscates the categories of assessment within the Aural Test and Quick Study.

Compounding the lack of standards is a third problem with the assessments; the descriptors within the rubric bands lack coherence. For example, the Quick Study rubric[68] labels its only category ‘Quick Study’, refers to ‘improvisation’ as the “improvised answer” and provides descriptors at each level that do not relate to the other levels. The following table illustrates how each level is awarded via a different

[67] Retrieved from: https://us.abrsm.org/en/our-exams/jazz-exams/ 17 Jan 2017

[68] I confirmed in my interview with the ABRSM syllabus author that examiners do indeed ask this series of yes-or-no questions of themselves when assessing the Jazz Quick Study.

term, (*coherence, contour, control, style*) rather than by four levels of 'coherence' or four levels of 'contour'.

Quick Study	Level
"Improvised answer **keeping in style**"	Distinction
"**Controlled** improvised answer"	Merit
"Improvised answer **has basic contour**"	Pass
"Improvised answer **lacking coherence**"	Below Pass

When assessing the Quick Study, the examiner must therefore ask themselves a series of 'yes' or 'no' questions beginning at the bottom of this rubric: "Was the improvisation coherent? Did the improvisation demonstrate basic contour? [Pass] Was the improvisation largely secure? [Merit] Did the improvisation keep within the style? [Distinction]".[69] It is problematic for the validity of this assessment that instead of four questions about the same pre-defined phenomenon (e.g. 'style' or 'contour'), each question is actually about a separate phenomenon. Holding this up to the second research question, which asked how improvisation was being assessed in graded music examinaations, the ABRSM Quick Study is assessed with four questions about separate phenomena that have been ranked without explanation (e.g. "keeping in style" earns a distinction whereas "basic contour" only earns a Pass).

While the lack of clear standards weakens the internal validity of the Quick Study assessment, it can also weaken the rigour across an exam because the improvisation-related terms used in the rubric (coherence, contour, control, style) are not the same terms that were used and defined within the Performance section rubric (pitch, time, tone, rhythm & performance). A critical comparison of Quick Study [Q.S.] to Performance rubrics revealed:

[69] I confirmed in my interview with the ABRSM executive that examiners do indeed ask this series of yes-or-no questions of themselves when assessing the Jazz Quick Study.

- 'Coherence' and 'contour' [in Q.S.] appear in the *Performance* section's 'pitch' category;
- 'Style' [Q.S.] appears in the *Performance* section's 'performance' category;
- 'Controlled' [Q.S.] appears in the *Performance* section's 'pitch', 'time' and 'tone' categories;
- None of the four Quick Study assessment terms appeared in the Performance section's 'shape' category, which is particularly odd since 'shape' is a key determinant for improvisation in the Performance rubric.

These bullet-pointed criticisms demonstrate that while some of the same terms are used in the Quick Study and Performance rubrics, they are used in different categories suggesting that the key terms do not have the same meanings across the Performance and Quick Study assessment curricula. For example, 'contour' is used as Pass-level undefined descriptor for 'improvised answer' whereas the Performance rubric uses 'contour' as a measurement in the pre-defined category of 'pitch'.[70] The lack of pre-defined standards within the Quick Study marking rubric thus makes it completely unclear to the stakeholders how the examiner can methodically and consistently assess a candidate's improvisation within the Quick Study and in robust comparisons with the Performance test of the same examination.

The other ABRSM improvisation musicianship test, Aural Test (option B), assesses "the all-round aural awareness and musicianship skills of the candidate" by asking the candidate to listen to an examiner playing "an introductory groove" on the piano and then "respond" by improvising as the examiner repeats the groove.[71] As with the Quick Study, I argue that while the ABRSM are clear in their rationale and instructions behind this test, the language used in the assessment documents are inconsistent within the test and also in comparison with the terms uses in the Performance and Quick Study assessments. For example, from the Aural Test

[70] I personally found it peculiar that in the language of ABRSM's improvisation *Performance* assessment, contour is not used to describe *shape* (which is semantically-related), but instead to describe *pitch*.
[71] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/jazzAuralTests11.pdf 17 Jan 2017

marking rubric[72] it can be discerned that the Aural Test assesses 'the response' via three categories bullet-pointed within the separate marking levels: confidence, strengths and perception.

At this point, it comes as no surprise that the key words 'improvise' and 'solo' from the Performance rubric or 'improvised answer' from the Quick Study are not used here and are instead replaced with references to the 'response'. The rubric distinguishes the quality of 'response' by a descriptive scale of confidence (i.e. 'vague', 'uncertain', 'secure') which is yet another new category not used in the other tests to assess improvisation. It is not clear why 'response' is measured by an evaluation of confidence rather than the terms used in the Quick Study (coherence, contour, control, & style) or the terms used in the bands of the Performance assessment rubric (pitch, time, tone, shape, performance). In addition, it is unclear from the guidelines and rubric how much improvisation is actually a part of this assessment and/or how much of the 'response' is awarded for the task of repeating the stimulus exactly before beginning the improvisation.

What is clear, is that the Aural Test lacks pre-defined standards that are synchronous with the other improvisation tests (Performance & Quick Study). In addition, the qualities of 'musically perceptive' and 'musically secure' are inserted into only one band each without explanation of to what they refer or why 'perceptive' is a higher-ranked quality than 'aware'. The lack of coherent pre-defined standards of assessment again result in a lack of clarity regarding what exactly is being assessed or how.

The main argument of this section, that robust assessment for qualification is dependent on clear pre-defined standards, is evidenced through the outcomes of the second research question building upon the outcomes of the first. When addressing the first research question *("How is improvisation defined and practiced…?"*), I found that both examination boards failed to define 'improvisation' or give shape to the practices expected by the examiners (see 4.1.1). Regarding the second research

[72] Retrieved from: http://abrsm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/jazzCriteria2016.pdf 20 Jan 2017

question, (*"How is improvisation assessed in graded music examinations?"*), I submit that the incoherence of the ABRSM's *Performance*, *Quick Study* and *Aural Test* assessment rubrics provide strong evidence that the ABRSM has not established clear robust standards. Thus inconsistent/incoherent marking rubrics are being used to assess something that has not been defined.

This combination of fundamental problems suggested a theme that will be later addressed in regard to the perceptions of improvisation (RQ3), that the ABRSM uses their institutional prestige and the historically high reputation for administering classical music examinations to mask the lack of validity of their improvisation (and jazz) arising from the complete lack of robust, consistent, meaningful and pre-defined terms within the assessment rubrics used by every examiner (4.3.1).

4.2.3 Questioning the validation of the qualification.

Within the *assessment for qualification and certification* framework, the second stage of valid assessment ('pre-defined standards' was the first) is the validation of the qualification by a competent body (Dufaux, 2012), namely an examiner and their examination board. This section addresses the competent bodies of graded music examinations, the ABRSM and TCL, and argues that validations of improvisation may likely be conducted by non-specialist examiners using assessment practices strongly consisting of gut reactions (Stanley *et al.*, 2002) justified by referencing inconsistent marking rubrics (see 4.2.2).

The ABRSM examiners' valuation of the qualification

As argued in section 4.2.2.2, the ABRSM's standards for assessing improvisation indicate that they assess improvisation as a *product* (the 'musical outcome') that is separate from the *process* that creates it (the 'performance'). This distinction is underpinned with a philosophical aesthetic distinction between subject and object in which improvisation can be assessed as a *product* that is entirely detached from the *process* that produces it (see 'product vs process' debate in 2.3.2). Through this

philosophical standpoint, the ABRSM justify their assertion that they assess the "musical outcome"[73] of a performance without assessing the performance and related technique that produces the musical outcome. I argue that by using this particular aesthetic stance towards assessing improvisation, the ABRSM firmly plants their flag in the philosophical traditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (i.e. Benson, 2003; Love, 2003) rather than join TCL in the more-recent leading views that improvisation is an holistic process occurring within specific cultural and communicative frameworks (Nettl, 2009; Monson *et al.*, 2004; Berliner, 1994) in which the product and process of improvisation are inherently interrelated (Landgraf, 2011; Love, 2003; Benson, 2003).

Key to making aesthetic judgements of a musical product are the specific criteria used to assign marks for separate skills and aspects of interpretation. 'Criteria-based' assessment of music was convincingly argued by Mills (1991) to lack strong ecologically-validity because it does not reflect the ways in which people assess music in the real world outside of graded music examinations (see 2.4.2). In order to learn more about the ABRSM's rationale for assessing improvisation as a product through specific criteria[74] and how they viewed the ecological validity, I posed the question to the ABRSM syllabus author during our interview. He responded:

> *We don't know the student. They've just walked into the room and are a complete stranger to us. We know nothing about their background. We know nothing about their teaching and how they've learned… so we only have the product to go on… we just have to mark what we hear. As an examiner, you don't get the chance to explore. That's just the way it is. You don't know the 'whys', you only know 'what'.*
> [01AE22.07.2015]

The time restrictions and format of the examinations limit the examiners in their capacity to engage with the candidates' improvisation-related processes (the 'whys'

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[73] Retrieved from: https://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/introduction-to-abrsm-our-mission-and-team/our-examiners/ 10 Jan 2017

[74] Explained in section 2.4, *segmented assessment* was Mills' (1991) description for assessing performance through the use of distinct categories such as *tone, rhythm* and *dynamics* rather than holistically.

of intentions and abilities) and must instead focus on the product (the 'what' that they heard during the improvised portion of each performance). Instead of addressing why this is a valid assessment, the ABRSM executive addresses why it is the most-valid assessment *within the timeframe and restrictions of each examination*; an argument that will be repeatedly used by the ABRSM to defend the validity of their assessments for qualifications.

Recalling the critical review of how music examiners make assessments (2.4.3), the main outcome was a debate between the differences between 'holistic' and 'criteria-based' assessments. The criteria-based assessments (Stanley *et al*., 2002) begin with a 'global assessment' (i.e. the examiner's gut reaction) and are followed by an act of justifying the global assessments by identifying specific characteristics of the performance. Lastly, examiners contemplate specific defined assessment criteria to ensure that adequate consideration is given to all aspects (e.g. key terms used as rubric categories) the performance. Since the ABRSM examiners make criteria-based assessments without sufficient pre-defined standards for improvisation (see 4.2.2.2), it is therefore important to evaluate what expertise the examiners have for making criteria-based assessments of music improvisation because it helps inform of us how they arrive at their 'global assessment' (Stanley *et al*., 2002) of improvisation.

Assessing the ABRSM's examiners

The ABRSM's Chief Examiner, John Holmes, provides the following description of their examiners and the processes that they use:

> *Our exams are music exams first rather than instrumental or singing exams and because of this we use generalist music examiners. ABRSM examiners assess all instruments and singing as generalist musicians rather than as instrumental or vocal specialists. They use our marking criteria to assess the musical outcome, not the technique used to achieve it, and this allows consistent marking across all instruments.*[75]

[75] Retrieved from: https://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/introduction-to-abrsm-our-mission-and-team/our-examiners/ 10 Jan 2017

In this extract from their institutional website, Holmes confirms that the ABRSM examiners are “generalist” rather than “specialist” and are trained to use the standard marking rubrics to assess “musical outcome” rather than specific technique. This is congruent with Dumlavwalla’s (2012) findings that in order to make consistent assessments, graded music examiners are expected to draw upon ‘direct training’ (i.e. using their marking rubrics) while simultaneously bracketing away their ‘indirect training’ (i.e. the specialist knowledge they acquired prior to becoming an examiner). This indicates that to the ABRSM, an examiner that has received a few hours of training to assess improvisation within the jazz examinations is equal to an examiner that has years of specialist jazz improvisation experience. This has consequences for the certification (4.2.4) because there is no special marking or guarantee whether or not the ABRSM certificate was validated by an expert or non-expert in jazz improvisation (see 4.2.3).

In section 4.2.2.2, I reported that the ABRSM’s Quick Study improvisation test used a rubric with a single-column containing descriptors of four separate phenomena (coherence, contour, control, style) rather than a column with four levels of the same pre-defined phenomena (e.g. minimal contour, average contour, high contour, etc.). From this, I argued that the validity of the assessment was questionable because the descriptors were vague, described separate phenomena and that higher levels could thus be achieved without demonstrating the qualities of the lower levels. Questioning the validation of the Quick Study, examiners that are not necessarily experts in improvisation ask themselves a series of unrelated ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions to assign a mark (i.e. Did the improvisation demonstrate ‘basic contour’? Was the improvisation ‘coherent’?) and by this, the candidate is awarded a mark for their improvisation. The combination of the poor rubric and the less-than-robust examiner’s decision process stemming from it are clear evidence of how the validation of the qualification can lack meaning.

Adding yet another layer of inconsistency, evidence from my case study revealed that in feedback to the Grade 4 Jazz Flute examination, the examiner refrained from using the key terms of the specific assessment (coherence, contour, control, style) and instead pointed out different qualities in their comments. Doing so invoked an additional set of assessment vocabulary:

> *The responses were fluent and prompt. Imaginative developments. There was scope for more nuanced musical shaping throughout.* [Appendix L]

The candidate achieved a score of 19 out of 21 points and the only criticism was "there was scope for more nuanced musical shaping" when 'shaping' does not appear in the Quick Study assessment rubric (it does however appear in the ABRSM Performance rubric). Neither the flute candidate or her teacher was able to explain what "nuanced shaping" had to do with the test. The teacher Flynn, an expert in improvisation with years of experience in preparing students for graded examinations was left with this meagre explanation:

> *'Musical shaping' sounds like personalising. The way you phrase your notes. Whether you bend into them or how you articulate them. Maybe you played the same way through all of them and the examiner was looking to see you caress the notes a little more… So, like, maybe. I don't know.* [06Flynn12.07.16]

The examiner's use of different language in his comments than what was in his marking rubric and assessment guidelines reflects poor 'linkage' (Dumlavwalla, 2011, p. 29). The three-stage framework of criteria-based assessment (see Stanley *et al.*, 2002 in section 2.4.2) reveals that poor linkage can be a symptom of deeper problems. After the examiner has made a 'global assessment' (i.e. gut reaction) to the Quick Study improvisation, they will look to their rubric to justify it. As a result of the lack of useful consistent categories and descriptors, the examiner likely be prompted to add their own descriptors (e.g. "there was scope for more nuanced musical shaping") to justify their gut reaction.

I would argue that this example of poor 'linkage' is a symptom of a larger endemic that casts doubt on the validation of an improvisation-related qualification from the ABRSM. Recalling the ABRSM Chief Examiner's statement about the use of 'generalist' examiners with the issues of the last few paragraphs, I argue that it is very likely that the ABRSM examiners with little or no experience with improvisation assess the "musical outcome" using 'gut reactions' (Stanley *et al.*, 2002) justified

through consultations and contemplations of highly-inconsistent rubrics lacking in pre-defined standards for improvisation.

Assessing the expertise behind the ABRSM improvisation curricula

A question therefore arises whether there is any improvisation expertise within the examination board. The message from the ABRSM's Chief Examiner on their institutional website helps clarify the areas in which specialists are commissioned to contribute to the curricula. Note that Holmes' statement mentions every component of a jazz or classical syllabus but assessment:

> *…we do use specialists to choose the pieces and songs for our syllabuses, to create our sight-reading and sight-singing tests, and to make decisions about technical requirements.* [76]

This statement further suggests that the ABRSM did not take the advice of expert consultants (e.g. jazz improvisers and teachers that teach improvisation) specifically for their assessment regulations. In my interview with the Chief of Syllabus, I asked about the roles of consultants in developing the jazz and improvisation curricula. He stated:

> *We need people at the grass-roots level. We need people that are used to teaching children who know what the expectations are and know the kinds of things that excite them. But you also need people, so called 'academic' type of people. It's quite a complex process…I mean with the jazz horns we had a number of experts working for a while in terms of determining what the contents of the exams should be. So how are we going to encompass the broadest range of jazz [repertoire]…* [01AE22.07.2015]

In this explanation, the ABRSM executive focuses on the range of experts consulted to select the 'tunes' in the repertoire and the rationale behind the categories and grades that each tune was placed. He continues:

[76] Retrieved from: https://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/introduction-to-abrsm-our-mission-and-team/our-examiners/ 10 Jan 2017

> *So, if you're doing "jazz trumpet" you'd have to find jazz trumpeters. For this particular jazz syllabus, we had a whole massive tune-finding exercise where we had a whole range of people giving us tunes so this might work. Then we'd look at them and say "well this might be a good three [Grade 3] tune if we cut that bit there or did that with it or whatever. And then we created the Real Book. So, it's very much a process of evolution. There's a lot of detail. It's quite complex and can last a long time.* [01AE22.07.2015]

While this confirms that the selection, categorisation and editing of repertoire and technical requirements were strongly influenced by jazz and improvisation experts, it still avoids confirming that experts influenced how improvisation is assessed within the jazz examinations. I was able to get the other side of the story from Troy, the brass teacher from my case study (Trumpet Grade 7) since he participated as a consultant to the ABRSM when they developed their Jazz Horns curricula. In our initial interview, Troy informed me that the ABRSM was interested in the consultants' advice regarding repertoire and scales but did not take advice regarding the assessment procedures. Troy's perception was that the ABRSM started with their existing classical assessment regulations and put little thought into how the assessment of improvisation might require different or additional standards. Troy recalled a recent conversation with a colleague with whom he had spoken a few days prior to our initial interview:

> *He [the colleague] picked a lot of the tunes that are in the trumpet syllabus. I asked him about how things developed, and he said, 'It was a nightmare!' [laughs]. His words. You know, coming in after they'd already established the way they wanted it to work and then asking the experts to fit something around their ideas. We got the feeling that the ABRSM, they make their money through selling the exams, and they seemed to see it as another source of revenue, and they hadn't thought very deeply about how exactly it was going to work. They wanted it to work in a similar way to their original exams, you know, three pieces, scales. But there's stuff particularly with the trumpet. Like you don't get to G major until grade 4 because of the range issues, so trying to find ways around that like going up to the 5th perhaps.* [00Troy09.05.16]

My conclusion from these diverse sources is that many experts, including academics, teachers, child-specialists, and instrument specialists are consulted during the creation of the jazz curricula and its improvisation components. However, the ABRSM was reportedly not very interested in their criticisms of how improvisation was to be assessed by the examiners. The analysis of the marking rubrics provides the strongest reason for why assessment advice was not sought. As demonstrated in section 4.2.2.2, the jazz syllabus is really the classical syllabus updated with a few references to 'improvisation', 'solo' and 'jazz' inserted sporadically as an additional descriptor within half of the rubric bands. This strongly suggests that to fit within the existing framework of the classical music examinations in which they specialise (e.g. timeframe, three tunes plus scales and arpeggios), the ABRSM has poured new tunes and scales into the old mould without restructuring the assessment to match. This helps confirm the overarching argument made at the beginning of section 0 that the ABRSM has used their trusted reputation for classical examinations to expand their variety of new products to include improvisation rather than develop a strong curriculum and tailor a specific assessment to match.[77]

Combining the evidence of this section, I argue that the levels of competencies (examiners and examination boards) are not clear regarding improvisation and its assessment. As a result, credibility and real-world validity are diminished because the assessments are determined by (1) a small amount of executives within the examination boards without significant input from independent expert consultants specifically in regard to the assessment of improvisation within graded music examinations and (2) examiners with no clearly indicated expertise in improvisation or jazz using inconsistent and ambiguous marking rubrics fundamentally based on a non-improvisation classical music assessment. These combined factors seriously call into question the competences of the expert examining body.

Assessing the expertise behind the TCL improvisation curricula

In developing the finding that TCL's *Supporting Test 2* rubric offered reasonably consistent pre-defined standards for improvisation whereas the jazz 'Performance' rubric neglected to include any mention of improvisation because the same rubric

[77] Economics is also a significant factor and will be addressed in section 0.

was used for classical (no improvisation) and jazz, I argue that the validation of improvisation is dubious because it is unclear whether or not the examiners are authorities of improvisation and whether they are qualified to assess both classical and jazz styles using the same rubric. For example, a validation of jazz improvisation by an examiner with little knowledge of improvisation or jazz is neither robust nor meaningful.

Looking closer at the expertise of the examiners, evidence from TCL's documents indicates that they (1) hire examiners that are "experienced" music teachers and performers, (2) that are experts in either classical or jazz styles (but not necessarily both), (3) provide them with exam-specific training to assess either genre. I will address each of these points and argue that they bring some doubt to the expertise of the examiners to validate improvisation-related qualification.

Regarding the first two points, TCL's policy for hiring examiners is that they must be "experienced classical or jazz music professionals – teachers and performers". [78] Examiners are therefore not expressly required to be experts of improvisation nor are they required to be experts of both classical and jazz genres. This supports doubts concerning the valuation of the qualification since there is no guarantee that the examiner will have expertise in the style, genre and contexts of the candidates' improvisations.

Regarding the third point, TCL examiners, like those of the ABRSM (4.2.2.2), are "generalists" rather than specialists, meaning that they are provided with some "additional training… as necessary to cover instrumental knowledge in areas less familiar".[79] This is in line with Dumlavwalla's (2011) notion of 'direct preparation' (see 2.4.3) in which graded music examiners draw upon the skills that they have learned in training from their examination board while bracketing away their other knowledge and experiences (their 'indirect' training). This indicates that the validation of the TCL music performance qualification, and the improvisation within, may be reliant upon a few days of general examination training and periodic reviews/updates rather than

[78] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/resource/?id=4405 17 Jan 2017
[79] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/resource/?id=4405 17 Jan 2017

expertise acquired prior to answering the call for "experienced classical or jazz music professionals". [80]

Bringing the key arguments together to address the second research question (*'How is improvisation assessed…?'*), I assert that the validation of improvisation within the TCL jazz *Pieces* section is dubious because TCL examiners use the classical rubric to mark jazz performance and that rubric contains no reference to improvisation (see 4.2.2.1). This rubric provides no indication of which categories are used to assess improvisation or how many marks are awarded specifically for improvisation in each category (e.g. how many of the seven marks available for one category are awarded specifically for improvisation?). As a consequence, key terms, points awarded, and contexts specific to how jazz improvisation is assessed in the TCL *Pieces* sections are not available to the examiner during the assessment.[81] It is therefore possible and likely that the validation of improvisation within a jazz performance is given by a non-expert using a rubric that lacks improvisation-specific criteria.

As an example of how these ambiguities and uncertainties combine to shape the assessment of improvisation, TCL examiners use the category of 'Fluency & Accuracy' to mark the fluency of rhythm and accuracy of note choice throughout the performance (4.2.2.1) but both 'fluency' and 'accuracy' can be stylistically contentious terms in the contexts of jazz improvisation. While the descriptors within the rubric allude to 'pulse' and 'rhythm' (Appendix F) they do not define these terms or distinguish the differences. When assessing TCL *Pieces* by jazz composers who purposely subvert rhythmic expectations by breaking up steady rhythmic pulses (e.g. Thelonious Monk), if the candidate should improvise within a similar style of broken rhythms, the understanding and validation of the candidate's choices are entirely dependent on the expertise of the examiner to award and not deduct marks for the candidate's intentional lack of a steady rhythmic pulse.

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[80] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/resource/?id=4405 17 Jan 2017

[81] By assessing improvisation using the specific criteria of the rubric, TCL indicates that they assess improvisation as both a *process* and a *product*, which marks a large contrast with the assessment practices of ABRSM, whom avoid marking the process of 'performance' and instead focus on the product termed 'musical outcome'.

Another concern about the validation of 'accuracy' within an improvisation arose in the observations of classical trumpet lessons. The tension within the assessment is that within the cultures and contexts of jazz improvisation, inaccurate/wrong notes may sound like accurate/right notes. The participants in the trumpet observations consistently spoke of 'accuracy' in relation to notated examination criteria (e.g. scales and arpeggios) but never when improvising. As Troy explained to his trumpet student, "…in improvisation there are no *wrong* notes. They are *interesting choices*" (01Troy09.05.16). Since it is the responsibility of the TCL examiners to interpret and determine the 'accuracy' of notes within improvisation, my argument is that the validity of these assessments depend on the specialist knowledge of the examiner, which can range from being a jazz improvisation expert to having no expertise at all.

As will be discussed in the next section, because the expertise of the individual examiners is not conveyed through the examiners' comments or *certification* that follows (i.e. diploma), there is no way of knowing whether or not the examiner representing the awarding body of the examinations was an expert in improvisation. There is no way of knowing the robustness, real-world (ecological) validity or general value of a TCL examiner's validation of improvisation within a jazz performance.

4.2.4 Certification: meanings conveyed by a graded music exam diploma.

The final stage of *assessment for validation and certification* framework is the awarding of a certification, which in graded music examinations is a diploma. Drawing from the literature review of 'document' (3.3.1.1), my argument is that the diplomas awarded after a graded music examination have multiple important functions. In addition to acting as an official record of qualifications, diplomas can serve as a tool to communicate a candidates' competencies and other information to stakeholders, education institutions and labour markets (OECD, 2007). The results from the certification may be used by a range of stakeholders (i.e. Davidson & Scutt, 1999) including teachers, parents, music schools/hubs, higher education institutions and potential employers and consequentially may have importance for the further trajectories and/or careers of the candidates (i.e. Dufaux, 2012).

Neither the ABRSM nor TCL include a reference to improvisation on their diplomas. It is therefore unclear to all that view a candidate's diploma whether or not the candidate chose improvisation options (the ABRSM's *Aural Test* & *Quick Study* or TCL's *Supporting Test 2*) rather than the standard non-improvisation options. Regarding improvisation within the Performance sections of the ABRSM and TCL jazz examinations, it could be assumed that since 'improvisation' is a requirement for all of those exams then the diploma would inherently reflect the candidate's improvisation. However, the teachers in all three of my cases provided evidence that it was common for instrumental music teachers to have their student memorise solos specifically for their ABRSM and TCL examinations which indicates that it cannot be assumed from the diploma certification that improvisation was actually a part of the assessment. As Sal explained:

> *A few years ago, I taught for a school where their last teacher had just retired. So, I showed up and had some grade eights and sevens and sixes and I thought they were advanced. And it turned out that all he'd [the previous teacher] been doing is 'ticking off'. You know, they'd have to play three pieces and there was nothing else… He'd had them all memorise the same solo for each exam… The point being that they have their certificate but at the end of the day, it's worthless to them if they can play three pieces and can't improvise and that's all they learn in a year… It can be detrimental to them.* [01Sal16.05.16]

Flynn echoed Sal's narrative and adds that teachers might give the same solo to all of their students:

> *I certainly know that there are teachers who do put quite a lot of kids in for exams, the jazz exams, who will actually give the kids solos to learn for the improvisational elements of their pieces. Which I don't do. I'd rather they get a slightly lower mark and put their own approach into what they are improvising. It's a bit frustrating...*
>
> *I know one teacher who's a good friend of mine, but he puts all of his brass pupils in giving them all the same solo. So, the examiner's going to be sitting there hearing slight variations of the same solo, but they have to mark it as an individual thing.* [01Flynn09.05.2016]

Sal's narrative brings to light the issue that by the contexts of the ABRSM and TCL's Performance tests, multiple students may enter the examiner's room one after another and perform the same memorised solo and receive a distinction on their diploma. I asked both examination boards about this scenario. The TCL executive declined to comment but the ABRSM executive explained that the examiners must assess what they hear in the moment and cannot make guesses about whether the solo was memorised or retrospectively adjust a candidate's score if they hear another candidate play the same solo.[82]

In terms of the authenticity of the improvisation and whether that is communicated by the certification, the candidate's achievements are not clearly communicated. As evidenced from the case study, it is currently possible for a candidate to achieve a certification for an ABRSM or TCL Jazz qualification requiring improvisation without actually having to improvise. Since any ABRSM or TCL jazz or diploma can be attained (a) without the candidate actually having to improvise, (b) without an indication of the expertise/capacity of the examiner to award the qualification, (c) or without an indication of what improvisation tasks the candidate demonstrated to earn the diploma, I would argue that the value, trust and recognition of the certifications are entirely reliant on the reputations of the examination boards and not on the transparency, validity or robustness of the underlying assessments.

4.3 RQ 3: Perceptions of 'Improvisation' in the ABRSM & TCL Examinations

This section addresses the third research question of this thesis: *What are the stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation in graded instrumental music examinations?*. I will build upon my earlier arguments regarding the inadequate *definitions*, *practices* and *assessment* standards provided by the examination boards to argue that while the boards may have intended their loose standards to be more

[82] The ABRSM executive that I interviewed clarified that this scenario goes against ABRSM's ethos of wanting to hear 'spontaneity'. Memorising an improvisation for the exam is the decision of the candidate and/or the candidate's teacher and is therefore out of the control of the examiners.

accepting of different improvisation practices (both pedagogical and performance), in reality they fostered uncertainty, dissatisfaction and a lack of belief in the validities of their examinations. Evidence from the case study observations and interviews will be presented to bring light to the participants' perceptions from boardroom to classroom as they conflict, contradict or mislead.

4.3.1 The Boards' perceptions of improvisation within their examinations.

While addressing the first two research questions in previous sections of this chapter, several perceptions of improvisation within graded music examinations emerged. One key outcome from the document analysis, that the ABRSM and TCL utilise corporate marketing language and promotional discourse to convey improvisation as an additional 'product' promoted to their global customers (see Appendix D), will be further refined by exploring the benefits for doing so. Two sub-themes emerge, (1) improvisation as a profit-maker for the exam boards, and (2) improvisation as a component of good instrumental pedagogy.

Concerning the first sub-theme, evidence from annual reports and stakeholder interviews is used to argue that the examination boards do not significantly profit financially from the inclusion of improvisation, meaning that the inclusion of improvisation is not primarily designed to generate more revenue. The second sub-theme draws primarily on interviews with the examination board executives and instrumental music teachers to argue that there is a dissonance between the pedagogical and examination-specific practices of improvisation. Thus, while being inclusive of improvisation does not generate a significant financial benefit, it boosts the examination boards' reputations for being receptive to candidates' self-expression and more-contemporary performance/pedagogical practices; a point that the teachers will argue as contentious and offer rebuttal the section that follows (4.3.2).

4.3.1.1 confuting perceptions of improvisation as a money-spinner

There have however been different perceptions about the value of including improvisation within the curricula. The perception expressed by the teachers and an ABRSM executive that I interviewed is that adding improvisation allows the ABRSM and TCL to reach more customers that might not be interested in the more-traditional non-improvisation syllabuses. As introduced earlier, Troy, who worked as a jazz syllabus consultant to the ABRSM but used TCL syllabuses with his own students, stated that among some of the consultants there was a perception that the ABRSM "…make their money through selling the exams, and they seemed to see it as another source of revenue and they hadn't thought very deeply about how exactly it was going to work" (see 4.2.3).

The evidence from the ABRSM and TCL's annual reports confutes the perceptions that improvisation options are primarily being included to generate further revenue. TCL does not make annual reports publicly available meaning that data on the amount of classical examination candidates choosing improvisation options ('Supporting Test 2') are unavailable. I raised this question in my initial interview with the TCL executive, who had a colleague respond to my question by email. The email confirmed that their percentages of candidates selecting improvisation were 'a little' higher than the ABRSM's but still not a significant part of their candidate numbers. My interview did reveal that TCL's newest and more-profitable syllabuses are English language certifications. This is confirmed in my analysis of Trinity College's institutional website (see Appendix C), which features over twice as many prominently-placed banners and articles for language tests than all of their music tests combined. The balance of evidence suggests that while TCL might generate extra income with examinations that are inclusive of improvisation, any revenue is much less than that of their other products. The area in which improvisation stands out is in their image and corporate marketing practices where they can gain a competitive advantage through promoting more-current repertoire, styles and engagement of individual "creativity and imagination" (see 4.2.2.1).

ABRSM's 2014 exam statistics[83] reveal that participants taking jazz examinations are dwarfed by the numbers of classical candidates. Concerning the three instruments in my case study, .08% of saxophonists, .004% of flautists and .03% of trumpet players chose a jazz syllabus rather than the classical counterpart. In the interview with the ABRSM executive, it was confirmed that 'take-up' of syllabuses with improvisation has been 'small-but-growing'. The interviewee made the important clarification that he and the ABRSM perceived improvisation as being both at the heart of jazz and as integral to some of the best teaching practices ('classical' included). From the core of the ABRSM, there is a push to get improvisation 'out there' to teachers and students but at the same time, this must harmonise with the reality that creating new curricula is an expensive endeavour and that the examination board expects to recoup its investment over time.

A consequence of the limited number of candidates signing up for the ABRSM and TCL jazz exams (and thus limited revenue) is that there are relatively few instruments available in the ABRSM and TCL jazz curricula. I asked the interviewees specifically about why more instruments did not have jazz improvisation options, such as the violin, which has a long jazz history and is their second-most popular instrument after piano. It was clarified that there was a balance between wanting to offer improvisation options for more instruments and being able to pay for the development of new syllabuses. The ABRSM executive expressed it clearly as a pragmatic balance between (a) musical and (b) commercial factors:

> *Yeah so there are two things. One is a pragmatic one about the marketplace really. We wanted just really to reflect the music in a typical combination, so we call it 'Jazz Horns', you know? 'Front-line instruments' really because that seemed to be where there was going to be a demand. There would be a demand for jazz violin. I mean violin has its place in early jazz. Quite a large place in early jazz actually… but in terms of learning jazz on the violin, there would be a very small take up. And the amount of resources it takes, if you can imagine, to create a syllabus is vast so we have to be certain we're getting some kind of return for our investment over a period of time. So that really doesn't make a lot of sense…But yeah, over time we might expand it. We*

83 Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/reports-research-and-statistics/2014-exam-statistics/ 15 Feb 2017

never said we won't. It's as much a commercial decision as a musical one. [01EA22.07.15]

This statement adds further clarity to another theme from the discussion about assessment in section 4.2.3: the examination boards' argument that formats and timeframes of improvisation assessments must be the same as for non-improvisation.[84] It may not be financially realistic to provide additional training to examiners or hire an improvisation-specialist examiner for a block of improvisation candidates (e.g. all jazz syllabus candidates at an exam centre scheduled in a row). While this is not a valid reason for not defining 'improvisation' (RQ1 in 4.1) or creating clear and consistent marking rubrics (RQ2 in 4.2), the tensions between 'commercial' and 'musical' provide further insight into the examination boards' perceptions of improvisation: it is a costly initial investment that must be recouped over time (e.g. creating the syllabuses & training the examiners) thereby discouraging the development of improvisation-specific assessment procedures and specialised examiner training.

This also adds more understanding to an earlier argument made by the case-study participants that the examination boards have added new tunes and scales into the old mould without restructuring the assessment to match (see 4.2.3) thereby using their trusted reputations to add validity to their new improvisation products.

4.3.1.2 'selling' the benefits of improvisation to teachers

Having cast doubt upon the teachers' perceptions that examination boards viewed improvisation primarily as a money-making venture, I would argue that the examination boards' perceptions of improvisation as an educational tool should be made stronger, clearer and more consistent in their curricula because their

[84] Whereas I had combined music assessment research (e.g. Stanley *et al.*, 2002; Mills, 1991) with outcomes from my case study to argue that valid and robust assessments of improvisation necessitated a different format than those used in the standard classical exams, the examination boards countered that their assessments were the most valid and robust that could be accomplished within the time constraints and formats necessary to offer fair examinations across the globe.

enthusiasm for improvisation is often not communicated clearly to their customers in the teaching-and-learning communities. In a clash with their intentions, the examination boards (particularly the ABRSM) generate a perception of improvisation as a fringe option by making few references to it and placing those references in non-prominent areas of their institutional websites. As a consequence, teachers and students may likely avoid or be unaware of the improvisation options.

TCL communicates their perceptions of improvisation as a pedagogical tool to music teachers via a single paragraph in a non-prominent page on their website:

> *Unarguably, it is proven that improvising gives us the opportunity for creative expression and the chance to explore our instruments and understanding of music in a holistic way. Some of the best teaching includes improvisation as a natural part of the lesson, in fact, in can be used as a method to further practice in all areas of musical study. Taking a few notes of a scale and exploring its development can help to build confident finger patterns and harmonic understanding.*[85]

TCL draws on corporate language to sell improvisation to teachers as "an opportunity" and "a chance" to use a "method to further practice" that is part of "the best teaching". Buzz words such as "creative expression", "holistic", "natural" and "confident" follow to describe the perceived benefits of including improvisation within instrumental music lessons. This description is in line with the ethos published in the front of the TCL syllabuses that encourages "candidates to express their own musical identities through options to improvise".[86]

Evidence from the case study reveals that the teacher's perceived values of improvisation matched with the statement by Trinity College. Sal, the jazz saxophone teacher, perceives improvisation and its practice as enabling musicians to holistically combine what they have learned (i.e. scales, theory & lore) in creative contexts beyond the specific improvisation-related tasks within an examination. While TCL examiners use rubrics to assess individual criteria (e.g. rhythm, pitch), Sal's

[85] Retrieved from: http://support.trinitycollege.co.uk/course/view.php?id=292 10 Jan 2017
[86] TCL Jazz Woodwind Syllabus, 2017-2020, p. 4.

perception is that improvisation should be assessed through the holistic use/combination of these criteria.

> *I try to teach more 'holistic'. You can teach to the exam criteria and the musicians will learn absolutely nothing. It will be effectively useless for them to being doing it. I try to be as loose as possible and teach around it [the syllabus]. So, if they have an option to do a scale study or scales, to teach them all the scales so they understand where the scales come from in a creative context, so they own it. And I think that's where the improv comes in. They take ownership of their learning.* [01Sal16.05.16]

The other TCL teacher, Troy, echoed Sal's perceptions but added that while the examination boards might say that improvisation is an important part of music lessons, the boards have been partially responsible for improvisations' diminished position in UK music pedagogy. This is because examination boards have been successful at shaping what they perceive to be the most important aspects of music making, and until recently, 'improvisation' was not included in their curricula (see 2.1).

Troy illustrates this through a reference to a Haydn trumpet concerto that his student has been learning for a TCL classical examination in which the cadenza is published within the sheet music and there is no assessment-related benefit to the student for improvising their own cadenzas.

> *…improvising is not seen as being that much of a necessary tool anymore. Whereas perhaps we all hear that all these trumpet players in Vienna with Haydn would improvise their cadenzas. It's a skill that's been lost. Probably because of published music where the cadenza is written for you.* [01Troy09.05.16]

There is a disparity between teaching a student to improvise and the minimal place for improvisation with the TCL trumpet examination. In agreement with TCL and Sal, Troy perceived that improvisation is an important additional subject within music that requires a time-consuming investment in consistent study and practice. Concurrently, TCL gives improvisation minimal weight and mention within its classical examination syllabi (the ABRSM gives none). While improvisation was thus

perceived by TCL and the case study participants as being a vital tool for learning music and developing self-expression, the teaching-and-learning community argued that in the context of examinations, the additional time and effort they perceived as being required for improvisation were met with an unbalanced and minimal reward.

The ABRSM also communicates their perceptions of improvisation through marketing language. In my interview with the ABRSM syllabus author, he clarified what he and the ABRSM perceived as the benefits and challenges associated with 'selling' improvisation:

> *For us the challenge is to get teachers to understand the benefits of improvisation because many instrumental teachers are not using improvisation at all. Well they might argue you can be the first clarinettist in a symphony orchestra, you don't have room to improvise... So actually, we're selling the benefits to them. That's a very important part of advocating for this syllabus.* [01EA22.07.15]

This position that the ABRSM avoids being directly involved in teaching-and-learning is contentious because it establishes what music pieces and technical skills need to be learned at specific levels. In addition, by publishing the sheet music and support materials required for the examinations, they have a continuous physical presence in an instrumental music lesson. In all three of my observation triads, books and materials (e.g. recordings, software) published by the examination boards were constantly present in the music lessons and the homes of the students, often piled upon pianos, shelves and music stands.

I asked the ABRSM syllabus author about the ABRSM's obvious presence in their candidates' musical lives and music lessons. He clarified that "The way people react to the resources is entirely up to them. We don't have control over that". A dissonance with Thomas' argument soon followed when he explained why it has been difficult to sell improvisation examinations to many teachers:

> *I think it's largely because teachers of classical music are lacking in experience or... not really aware of the benefits of improvisation to learning or teaching-and-learning, you know. And that's something we're trying to address and now it's being seen as a*

bit of a lacuna in music education because people are realising that without this ability to be playful and to explore these scale and technical aspects themselves, you're missing a trick as a teacher. So, we need to tell them that. [01EA22.07.15]

This statement is akin to Troy's argument that improvisation is an important skill for teaching-and-learning but that it died out in the last century. It is unclear from my interview whether or not the ABRSM would admit to having been a part of the pedagogical culture that has diminished the perceived importance of improvisation as "an ingredient to a good performance".[87] However, it is clear from the ABRSM's syllabuses, website and my interviews that there is an aim to advocate for the benefits of improvisation to teachers and candidates. Since these are not clearly or prominently communicated to the teaching-and-learning stakeholders, the perceived relevance of the performance and pedagogical practices of improvisation are diminished.

4.3.1.3 communicating mixed perceptions of improvisation

The analysis of the ABRSM's and TCL's institutional websites revealed that neither board directly refers to 'improvisation' (or the jazz syllabuses) in their 'Home' and 'About' website pages (see Appendix C) and by failing to do so, communicate that improvisation is not salient enough of a product to be included in their primary institutional narratives (i.e. Saichaie, 2011; Fairclough, 2013). This perception is reinforced by the relatively few references to 'improvisation' being positioned in less-prominent locations such as a hyperlink to a specific syllabus from the 'Exams' page or a yearly blog post.[88]

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[87] Quote retrieved from: https://gb.abrsm.org/en/exam-support/your-guide-to-abrsm-exams/how-we-mark-exams 20 Jan 2017

[88] Both boards place the three most-recent 'News' and 'Blog' updates in the mediator section of their Home Page, thus suggesting its minor importance (see 3.3.1.3). The blog posts did appear as a non-prominent headline on the Home Page for several weeks but was replaced by fresher blogs. Consequently, the blog post can then only be found by searching through the older blog posts in a difficult to find location of the websites, thereby signifying a perception of relative unimportance.

The most-prominent references to improvisation are located in the ABRSM's and TCL's infrequent blog posts, which provide the clearest and most concise descriptions of the boards' jazz assessment criteria. The obscure positioning of the only direct references to improvisation within the ABRSM's and TCL's websites as brief notices of upcoming changes to marking criteria is evidence (i.e. Fairclough, 2013; Saichaie, 2011) that the perceptions expressed in the last section (4.3.1.2) of improvisation as part of the "best teaching practices" are not communicated to the teaching-and-learning community. Instead, the message is that improvisation is perceived as a minor product or ancillary option.

Both examination boards published their first and only blog posts of 2016 at the end of the year to notify viewers of upcoming 2017 changes to how improvisation is marked. The ABRSM article features a photo of the 'BBC Young Musician of the Year 2016' playing a saxophone accompanied with the heading: "We've updated our marking criteria for jazz exams".[89] They thus communicate a relationship between their improvisation options to a prestigious award and a young contest winner. The updated assessment criteria posted in their blog are the most complete and thorough listing of criteria provided by the ABRSM in its 2016-2017 documents. It is notable that within one month, the blog post was replaced on the 'Home' page by newer posts and could only then be found through a search of old blog posts. The ABRSM thus presents a mix of perceptions, improvisation is visually demonstrated to be young, attractive, relatable, contemporary and prestigious, yet the actual contents of the assessment are communicated as obscure, scattered and not of lasting importance (i.e. Saichaie, 2011; Fairclough, 2013).

Like the ABRSM, TCL positions their most concise description of the improvisation assessments (with hyperlinks to the specifications) on an obscure blog post from December 2016; their only mention of improvisation that year. [90] The same post includes a hyperlink to the Trinity Shop where one can order ancillary products: two

[89] Retrieved from: https://us.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/news-articles-and-comment/latest-news/article/updated-jazz-marking-criteria/764/ 17 Jan 2017
[90] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.com/news/viewarticle.php?id=463 17 Jan 2017

books with CDs that contain "sample tests, advice, explanations".[91] Like the ABRSM blog post, it was replaced by fresher news in less than one month and was thus relegated to the obscurity of the blog section.

A strong difference between Trinity College and the ABRSM was found through the analysis of their 'Exam' pages, which is the area that contains links to their individual syllabuses. TCL positions hyperlinks to their jazz syllabuses and classical syllabuses next to each other and conveys a perception that they and their customers have an interest in both options. The ABRSM segregates jazz and classical syllabus options thereby communicating a very different perception about their customers while making it challenging for users of classical syllabuses to know that they have options for improvisation.

When improvisation is referenced on the Exams pages, it appears as a hyperlink to a webpage containing a brief description of the jazz syllabus with links to PDFs of the syllabuses. TCL's Woodwind and Jazz Woodwind syllabuses and related information are positioned next to each other on the same page,[92] suggesting that TCL perceives (a) the syllabuses with improvisation and without improvisation to be related to each other and that their customers might be interested in exploring both options (e.g. 'flute' is a five-page scroll from 'jazz flute') and that (b) classical syllabuses were the primary standard and not in need of a distinguishing label (the syllabus is labelled 'flute' not 'classical flute') whereas jazz is the secondary syllabus always positioned below or after the classical hyperlinks and in need of the 'jazz' label to distinguish it.

The ABRSM differs by going much further to segregate their classical non-improvisation options from their options with improvisation. For example, if the

[91] Retrieved from: http://shop.trinitycollege.com/shop/powersearch/powersearch_results?searchaural+2017 17 Jan 2017
[92] See http://www.trinitycollege.com/site/?id=1052 Retrieved on 17 Jan 2017

viewer clicks on the Home Page 'Flute' button, they are taken to the Flute syllabus page located within the 'Our Exams' menu[93] and offered links to specific grade levels (1-8, 'Performance Diploma', 'Music Medals'[94]). By not offering the jazz/improvisation options with the classical syllabuses, (something that would boost their low number of jazz candidates), the ABRSM further communicates the perception that jazz and its integral improvisation options are fringe options, not as an important performance and pedagogical practices.

The perception of little relevance communicated by the ABRSM through their website is shown on the right as a miniaturised screenshot of the ABRSM 'Our Exams' webpage.[95] The image of the long scrolling page is tiny because by scale it requires seven sheets of A4 paper to print the full-size image and arrive at the bottom where the jazz syllabuses are located. I have added red arrows to indicate that classical 'flute', one of the ABRSM's most-popular syllabuses, is positioned near the top whereas 'jazz flute' is six pages bellow with the other jazz options (boxed in red).

This positioning can be used as evidence (i.e. Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006) that the ABRSM does not perceive the improvisation examinations to be as salient to communicate to their website viewers/customers as the classical-genre examinations. The fact that the 'Jazz Flute' buttons contain no mention of the classical syllabuses or vice versa communicates a perception from the ABRSM that improvisation and jazz should be segregated from non-improvisation and the classical syllabuses.

[93] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/our-exams/woodwind-exams/flute-exams/ 10 Sept 2016
[94] 'Music Medals' is a primary level syllabus that contains improvisation exercises, which supports the argument that ABRSM perceives improvisation as having value to learning music. I would however argue that the inclusion of 'Music Medals' but exclusion of Jazz communicates that primary-level teachers and their students might be interested in improvisation, but not the more advanced students.
[95] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/our-exams/woodwind-exams/flute-exams/ 10 Sept 2016

While this perception seemingly conflicts with the recently-presented interview findings arguing for the relevance of improvisation, I argue that it supports a hypothesis presented at the outset of this thesis: The perceptions of improvisation are shaped by the various stakeholders and thus the journey from board room to classroom is not fixed but nested in overlapping goals and interpretations.

4.3.2 Teaching-and-learning perceptions of improvisation.

Regarding the teaching-and-learning stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation in graded music examinations (RQ3), the observations and interviews of the case study participant triads (*TCL jazz saxophone & classical trumpet, ABRSM jazz flute*) revealed three major cross-case themes: (a) how improvisation is practiced through 'replication and formalising', (b) the perceived importance of contexts and cultural models for the practice of improvisation, and (c) there are strong perceptions that examinations with improvisation require more preparation than exams without improvisation. In addition to refining the earlier arguments and disparities arising from the teaching-and-learning perspectives, I argue that the key differences between their perceptions of improvisation and the examination boards result in contextual distinctions between improvisation within and outside of graded music examinations.

Perceptions of the practices of improvisation

Briefly recalling the literature review, there was a strong consensus that when learning to improvise, musicians need not only learn technical skills (e.g. scales and arpeggios) and repertoire, they must learn and follow specific cultural models relating to their music (i.e. Biasutti, 2017; Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995; Moore, 1992). Recognising that improvisation typically begins with a 'point of departure' (Nettl, 1998) such as a melody or harmonic structure, I concluded that "improvisation happens when practiced skills are spontaneously combined with cultural models and something upon which to improvise" (2.3.2). Evidence from my case study interviews and observations revealed that while the music teachers each conveyed slightly

different perceptions of improvisation to their students (i.e. benefits, aims), their core perceptions aligned with my conclusions from the literature review. This indicated that the examination boards could write standard useable definitions of improvisation for their syllabuses rather than the current practice of not defining improvisation; which was argued to weaken the validity of the examinations because it was unclear to the participants what exactly was being examined.

In all of the observed music lessons, contexts of improvisation were related by the teachers to specific practices and cultural models such as improvising cadenzas within the culture of *Haydn's Vienna* (Troy) or improvising melodic variations in *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans* (Sal). These contexts and cultural models clashed in descriptions of 'authentic' versus 'artificial' contexts of improvisation (i.e. "for the exam…"). The teachers and their students (whose perceptions of improvisation are shaped by the teachers) did not recognise many of the contexts of improvisation in the examinations (e.g. the ABRSM's 'Musicianship Tests' & TCL's Motivic' Supporting Test 2) as naturally-occurring or belonging to recognized cultural models (i.e. Della Pietra & Campbell, 1995). In these instances, the observation participants cast doubt on the ecological validity of the assessments because the improvisation tests were not perceived as assessing real-life contexts of improvisation.

From the interviews with teachers and students, an unforeseen paradox arose between what were perceived to be 'natural' and 'artificial' contexts of improvisation. The teachers had a unanimous perception that the 'artificial' contexts of the examinations did more to benefit the reputations of the examination boards' (by associating their exams with contextually valid, real-world music practices) than the exams did to provide validation to the 'natural' performances of the candidates. The paradox being that the contextually and culturally authentic performances provided credibility to the examinations rather than the examinations giving credibility to the performances. For example, none of the teachers were of the opinion that the examinations validated their students' improvisations because the tests were perceived as being contrived rather than real. At the same time, when the ABRSM or TCL state that they encourage candidates to demonstrate their own personalities through improvisation, it is a boon to their corporate images because they market themselves as being more open to modern styles and self-expression through

improvisation. Thus, while the examination boards perceived the inclusion of improvisation as a benefit for the teachers and their pedagogical practices, teachers rejected this because the improvisation in the syllabuses did not align with the improvisation in their pedagogical practices.

Further investigating the teaching-and-learning stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation within their pedagogical practices as they prepare for graded music examinations, my cross-case analysis of all three teacher-student dyads engaged revealed core perceptions of how the performance practices of improvisation developed from the pedagogical practices of improvisation. The most prominent theme being that critical listening and transcriptions of improvisations were perceived by the teachers as being the most important tools for developing improvisation and related musicianship.

All three teachers explained that while there was general value in replicating 'role model' solos (e.g. developing tone and technique), the teachers stressed the importance of developing the abilities to recontextualise parts/ideas from the transcriptions into new contexts. For example, Sal related that his initial exposure to improvisation as a student was transcribing Charlie Parker[96] alto saxophone solos and replicating them for the formal examinations. While transcribing, memorising and performing the Charlie Parker solos note-for-note was a successful strategy getting high-marks in his Trinity Guildhall exams fifteen years ago, his perceptions of improvisation have developed. Sal now maintains that he was not really improvising, just copying. Sal explained:

> *The Trinity Guildhall exams were easy for me. It turns out they were tailor-made because I listened to a lot of Charlie Parker. It didn't really affect the way I thought about improvisation...* [00Sal16.05.16]

The initial steps towards "really improvising" came from an instrumental music teacher who would 'formalise' his 'replications' by applying music theory and

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[96] Charlie Parker (1920-1955) was a master jazz saxophone player known for innovative improvisations. Some of his compositions and improvisations, such as 'Yardbird Suite', are included in the TCL Grade 7 Jazz Saxophone syllabus.

examples drawn from past masters to help Sal contextualise/re-contextualise his transcriptions:

> *My ears were always way ahead of what I knew. I'd be able to play a Charlie Parker thing and I wouldn't have a clue what it was, and I go to my teacher and he would say 'you can play that over this'.* [00Sal16.05.16]

Sal recalled that well into his conservatory experience he was still struggling to "have my own input" and that it took four years of college to "streamline everything" (i.e. 'replication', 'ears', 'scales' and 'advanced things') to the point where he perceived that he had taken control of his improvisation practice. It was through a guided framework inclusive of repetition and formalisation that Sal's performance and pedagogical practices matured, not through memorising solos for the graded examinations.

In the observations of TCL-based classical trumpet lessons, the student Tim had been transcribing solos and fragments of favourite melodies but had difficulty in developing the transcriptions into improvisations. His 'repetition' was stronger than his 'formalisation'. His teacher explained that Tim's trouble was that he struggled to quickly recognise and respond to different 7th chords,[97] which is why he chose the 'melodic' option of *Supporting Test 2*. Troy instructed Tim to use melodic fragments from the TCL performance repertoire (e.g. the first few notes of Vizzutti's 'Funk') and incorporate them into ii-V-I exercises.[98]

> *… after you work out the Vizzutti piece, take some time and play over the sequence and if you want to be really creative, take a few notes from the Vizzutti piece and use them as the basis of your improvisation here [indicating the TCL Aural Test 2 sample]. Even if it's just three or four notes, use those notes and apply them to this key.* [01Troy29.05.16]

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[97] A '7th chord' is a four-note chord that comes in four varieties in the TCL improvisation assessments; *minor*, *major*, *dominant*, and *minor 7 flat 5*. Tim had difficult differentiating and remembering the theory underlying them. I also observed Tim be confused by a chord symbol used in the TCL Supporting Test 2 specimen, 'F#m(b5)'. Troy explained the chord as being Trinity College's "bizarre way of indicating a diminished triad". This evidences the perceived distinctions between 'authentic' contexts and those 'for the exam'.

[98] Two-five-one chord sequences in different keys. Usually in a cycle of fourths or fifths.

This statement suggested the perception of a repetition/formalisation distinction by demonstrating that music practiced from one genre may be applied to another. The participants were using the non-improvisation materials (repetition of a melodic phrase) in the contexts of the improvisation tests (formalisation) to develop Tim's improvisation skills. Tim's proficiency in replication was much higher than his ability to formalise musical structures through connecting melody with music harmony and a more macro-contextual schema. Playing to Tim's strengths, Troy recommended that Tim choose the 'motivic' option of Supporting Test 2 [99] because his perception was that the examiners will listen for Tim's tonal and articulation contrasts rather than Tim's abilities to outline chord changes.

In observations of the ABRSM-based jazz flute lessons, Flynn and Heather's practice was based on a perception of improvisation as being a game of "how to be creative with the mechanical". Heather engaged with replication through memorising materials drawn directly from the ABRSM Grade 4 jazz flute syllabus (e.g. scales, arpeggios, melody excerpts) and then applying them creatively within the chords and sequences of the Grade 4 repertoire. In one observation, Flynn gave a lengthy technical explanation of the chord structure of the song 'Fotografia' that illustrates the practice of using repetition and formalising within a real-life context. He guided Heather on how to improvise through a section of 'Fotografia' by applying two arpeggios that she knows (C7 & F7) to a sequence of four chords and how that technique could be expanded to larger sequences. After the explanation, he asked Heather if she was "following" him:

Heather: *Yes, but I don't know what to play! [Laughs]*

Flynn: *Let's start with what you know. C arpeggio. Play it. [Heather plays the C7 arpeggio]. The C7 has an E-natural and so does the G flat.*
For this line, you can exploit that difference for the first two chords. And then it changes quality with the 7-sus, which is not the real quality of that chord, that's just something they've written in this book because technically an F7 chord shouldn't have a B-flat in the top. Don't worry about that and just play your normal F7. [03Flynn07.06.16]

[99] The candidate improvises in response to a short motif performed by the examiner.

Flynn's explanation is based on applying the exam-specific technical skills (e.g. C7 arpeggio) to what he perceives as the higher context of 'real' improvisation (outlining changing guide tone lines) and then translating that back down to what must be done for the specific context of the examination ("Just play your normal F"). Flynn then goes on to offer a cultural model for the same section by drawing upon the use of pentatonic scales:

> *These are very useful for soloing. They are some of the most versatile scales. Cultures from all around the world use them in their music, their folk music. There is something simplistic and primal about them. China. Africa. The American South.*
> [03Flynn07.06.16]

In other discussions, Flynn addressed what he perceived to be differences between higher and lower ('authentic' vs 'for the exams') perceptions of contexts within the same genre (i.e. "jazz" versus "jazz exam"). Recalling an example from section 4.1.2, when Heather asked him to explain the 'F 6/9' chord in the repertoire piece 'Fotografia', Flynn first described the qualities of the chord as it related to the contexts of different music genres and cultures ("…a little softer than a major seventh chord. They are common in country music actually, and when someone wants to end on a bright, slightly-unresolved finish"). Flynn then provided a specification of what the 'F 6/9' chord means in the (perceived to be lesser) context of the Grade 4 Jazz Flute examination (They've written out four notes here. The first is the 9th and the last is the 6th…So if you can play a bit of a scale or arpeggio, or both, and finish on the 9 or 6, which are G and D, you will have that bright finish they want).

Flynn's conclusion highlights the large gap between the holistic approaches perceived as integral to the pedagogy and practice of improvisation (see 2.3.1), and the "just need to show" criteria strategies perceived as necessary for the purpose of the ABRSM Jazz Performance assessment. Flynn has a clear perception of what needs to be learned for 'real' improvisation as well as what needs to be demonstrated to the examiner during the exam. Perceiving that most examiners do not know enough about improvisation, he recommends to many students that they should simplify their improvisations to make the individual skills apparent to the

examiners. His voice joins with the other music teachers to express uniform dissatisfaction that the assessments do not validate what they perceive to be the most important aspect of improvisation, the candidate's integration of separate skills into new contexts through a theoretical framework.

4.3.2.1 perceptions that exams with improvisation require extra preparation

All three of the participant triads maintained that examinations with improvisation required more time to prepare and more skills to learn than examinations without improvisation. Their perception was that improvisation was a separate collection of skills and knowledge than those used in the standard examinations without improvisation. Moreover, the teachers reported that they believed that the pressures on teachers encouraged many to have their students memorise other musicians' improvisations for the exams because it was a more-efficient and guaranteed high marks. These perceptions clashed against statements by the examination boards that jazz examinations (with improvisation) required the same amount of preparation as classical examinations (without improvisation).

Memorising solos

Relating *perceptions* (RQ3) *assessment* (RQ2) and *practices* (RQ1) of improvisation, all three teachers maintained that the pressures to succeed on the exam combined with the inadequate definitions and assessment policies, encouraged the practice of memorising improvisation transcriptions for the performance section of the ABRSM and TCL jazz exams rather than learn to develop their own. Thus, while the examinations were marketed by the boards as encouraging creative practices, the structure of the *Performance* sections enabled and rewarded practices reliant upon repetition of memorised solos rather than engaging with what the participant teachers perceived as authentic creative and spontaneous improvisation practices.

Perceiving dissonance between the lack of assessment/practice specificity and pedagogical goals, Sal drew from his experiences of having known of candidates that achieved high marks by memorising solos to argue that since memorising

improvisations is a safer, easier and quicker way to prepare for a graded music examination, the current curricula encourages this practice rather than encouraging improvisation to be developed as a learning tool that steadily allows the student to 'take ownership' of their music.

> *I certainly know that there are teachers who do put quite a lot of kids in for exams, the jazz exams, who will actually give the kids solos to learn for the improvisational elements of their pieces. Which I don't do. I'd rather they get a slightly lower mark and put their own approach into what they are improvising. It's a bit frustrating.* [01Flynn09.05.2016]

Sal's statement builds on the argument that by intentionally using vague language to allow for greater flexibility of teaching-and-learning, the examination boards have actually encouraged a practice of memorising and performing solos. For Sal as well as the other teachers, the fact that an examiner assesses memorised solos using the same marking criteria as they would for a candidate that performs a spontaneous improvisation goes against the fundamental rationale underpinning the pedagogical and performance practices of improvisation.

Echoing Sal's perceptions, Flynn raised further doubt about the entire meaning and validity of an ABRSM Jazz certification in regard to the practices of improvisation:

> *I run a couple of jazz groups in schools where I teach and include improvisation in those. And I'll have some pupils come in from other teachers that got Grade 5 ABRSM [jazz] but as soon as you give them a fresh tune, they have got no idea of how to approach it. Then I may have one of my own pupils in that group who has only done Grade 1 Jazz and not done that great on it, but at least they have an idea of what they can do and how to approach it.* [01Flynn09.05.2016]

Flynn's experiences add further support to my argument that the ABRSM and TCL certifications fail to communicate the improvisation achievements of the candidates and as a result, any trust or value was derived more from the reputations of the examination boards rather than internal robustness or validity of the examinations (see 4.2.4). The evidence that a weak Grade 1 Jazz candidate can have a better

grasp of improvisation than multiple candidates with Grade 5 Jazz diplomas (which includes five grades-worth of memorised unrelated scales and arpeggios) illustrates the disparity of improvisation practices that the vague curricula of the music examination boards currently encourages, validates and certifies.

As any ABRSM or TCL jazz diploma can be attained (a) without the candidate actually having to improvise, (b) without an indication of the expertise/capacity of the examiner to award the qualification (see 4.2.3), or (c) without an indication of what improvisation tasks the candidate demonstrated to earn the diploma (see 4.2.4), it becomes clearer that perceptions of value, trust and recognition of the certifications are entirely reliant on perceptions of the examination boards' reputations instead of the transparency, validity and robustness underpinning the assessments.

Confirming the perceptions

In an email correspondence with a qualification development officer at TCL, I asked whether they recognised a difference in the hours of preparation required for examinations with improvisation and between the classical and jazz examinations. I received the following answer:

> *In order to be compliant with Ofqual regulations our qualifications have to meet a number of criteria, including expertise in qualification design, rigorous training of examiners, robust assessment criteria, measures to standardise the marking across examiners, etc. These are considered in the same way for qualifications including improvisation as for the classical exams.*
>
> *Trinity is currently considering GLH and TQT for all regulated qualifications, and we are consulting teachers for their views on learning time for the 'average' learner. These will be consistent across all our classical, jazz and rock & pop subjects.*
> [01TQD03.24.16]

Unpacking the terminology, TCL's answer references Ofqual's 2015 update to a new qualifications framework that measures the 'size' of a qualification by *Total Qualification Time* (TQT), which includes all the time needed to gain a qualification. A key determinant of TQT are the number of *Guided Learning Hours* (GLH), which

include teaching, assessment and other study. Ofqual states that the TQT value is determined by measuring the time taken for "a cohort of learners to achieve their qualification and that should reflect any pre-existing knowledge within that cohort".[100]

When TCL states that they are "currently considering GLH and TQT", there is an implication that they have not done this prior to the 2015 Ofqual updated compliance requirements. Supporting this with the position that qualification criteria are "considered in the same way for qualifications including improvisation as for the classical exams" they further imply that their position has been that they did not recognise a difference in preparation. Making future plans to determine the Total Qualification Time through "consulting teachers for their views on learning time" is a positive step for adding validity to the qualification. However, TCL is beginning from a biased position and will be submitting their own figures to Ofqual based on the reports of anonymous teachers. In regard to my previous finding that the syllabuses were written with consultation from teachers, academics and professional improvisers, it seems highly unlikely that none of the consultants mentioned to the syllabus authors or the qualifications development officer that learning to improvise requires more guided learning hours than an examination without improvisation. As of the end of 2017, TCL has not altered their position about improvisation and non-improvisation requiring the same *Total Qualification Time*.

The two participant triads working with TCL curricula were in accord that improvisation required more instruction with the teachers and more individual practice time (i.e. Guided Learning Hours). This finding contrasts with TCL's perceptions of GLH/TQT and stands out from the other observation outcomes because it was reported more frequently and emphatically by the students and parents rather than by the teachers.

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[100] Retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/461401/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework-decisions-on-conditions-and-guidance-for-the-rqf.pdf30 Jan 2018

4.3.2.2 after the exams: evolving perceptions of improvisation

Like Davidson and Scutt (1999), my research captured changes in perceptions leading up to the examination as well as in the first lesson after the exam. While their research brought to light the pressures of the examination experiences and the related changes in relationships between the participants, my research used a similar framework to illuminate the active shaping (3.3.1.5) of the participants' perceptions of improvisation between the participants. The outcomes of my observations reveal that in the high-pressure lessons before the examination, the teachers made their strongest distinctions between what they perceived as 'real' and 'artificial' improvisation. These occurred as strategies for how take pieces of 'improvisation' as expressed in their lessons (i.e. the 'real' improvisation) and to adapt them specifically for improvisation within the upcoming examination (i.e. perceived to be artificial).

Being that the teachers were unsure of what exactly the examiners were assessing or how (see 4.1-4.2) the teachers' perceptions of examination-specific 'improvisation' were largely influenced by feedback from previous examinations or their own experiences as a music student decades before. In the lesson after the examinations, the results were often received with disappointment by the teachers and students due to the vague feedback. When this occurred, the teachers dismissed the examinations as having little meaning with regard to improvisation.

TCL Jazz Saxophone exemplar

The jazz saxophone participants regularly included improvisation in their lessons as warm-up exercises, ear training and as a performance practice such as playing a solo over a jazz standard. After the examination, Chad received the mark of Merit and was disappointed because he had previously earned Distinctions on his classical (non-improvisation) exams (TCL Saxophone Grades 1-6). When interpreting his examination results, Chad, his mother and his teacher came to the consensus that Chad had improvised well but just missed the Distinction because his sight reading and performance of a technical exercise ('Tough Guys!') were not as strong. The three participants concluded that in hindsight, they may have spent too much time practicing improvisation and not enough on what Sal calls the "classical

components" of the exam such as sight reading. As a result, Chad was discouraged from pursuing the jazz exam in the future and resolved to return to the classical syllabus for the Grade 8 exam because he perceived the exams without improvisation as requiring less effort. Chad's mother had a similar perception and added that it would be important to get a Distinction on Grade 8 next year because it was the highest level of the grades.

The participants' shared a perception that improvisation in graded examinations requiring additional practice hours on top of the classical requirements. This supports my recent argument that the boards' Ofqual compliance requirements failed to account for extra Guided Learning Hours (4.3.2.1) associated with improvisation. This also sheds light on one likely reason why it is reportedly common for candidates to memorise solos (or their teachers to give them solos to memorise) rather than learn to improvise, it requires less Total Preparation Time (*ibid*). Combining this with the teachers' statements that their peripatetic colleagues were commonly having the lengths of their lessons reduced, it is possible that the vague language and undefined practices of improvisation assessments encourages practices of performing memorised improvisations rather than 'real' improvisation when lesson and/or practice hours are limited.

TCL Trumpet exemplar

The participants in the trumpet observations also perceived that 'improvisation' was an extra subject requiring additional ongoing attention. As with the jazz saxophone exemplar, the classical trumpet participants tied this with perceptions of contextual differences between improvisation in and out of graded music examinations that require more preparation than examinations without improvisation.

In our initial interview, Troy stated that the options for improvisation are often avoided by teachers and students because they were under too much pressure to perfect the performance and technical skills required by the examination syllabuses. He believed that improvisation was not perceived as relevant by most classically-oriented music teachers.

> *…improvising is not seen as being that much of a necessary tool anymore, whereas perhaps we all hear that all these trumpet players in Vienna with Haydn would improvise their cadenzas. It's a skill that's been lost. Probably because of published music where the cadenza is written for you.* [00Troy09.05.16][101]

Troy perceived that the "whole culture" of graded music examinations was in part responsible for the pressures on what instrumental teachers needed to prioritise. There were thus two interrelated problems, (a) teachers and students lacked sufficient time to address improvisation and (b) the examination boards reinforce the status quo by not presenting options to include improvisation as part of the performance assessment. Expanding upon this last point, Troy explained that since improvisation was an option worth only ten points and that the points could be earned by answering simple questions without having to improvise (i.e. the aural tests[102]), there was very little incentive provided by the examination boards to candidates and their teachers to spend the extra time developing improvisation skills specifically for a classical music exam. These arguments are particularly persuasive in light of my earlier finding that neither the ABRSM nor TCL include a reference to improvisation on their diplomas. Thus, if the goal is to receive a distinction on an exam, improvisation could be perceived as not relevant or an advisable option.

In the lesson after the TCL classical Trumpet examination, Troy and Tim discussed the results of Tim's 'motivic' improvisation assessment (*Supporting Test 2*) in greater detail. Since Tim received the highest possible score (10/10 marks), no one from the triad of participants questioned the few comments regarding improvisation very deeply. However, my final interview with Troy revealed differing perceptions that went unspoken during the observations which challenged the ecological validity of the test by positioning the context of the task as unnatural and not occurring in real-life. Troy explained that he had only encountered the 'motivic' exam context once before, at a contest he entered as a student at Trinity College in London.

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[101] The publishing practices in which the cadenza is not improvised but instead composed and notated in the sheet music began in the nineteenth century (Love, 2003) and have been used by ABRSM and TCL since their founding in the late nineteenth century.
[102] Trinity College London Brass Syllabus. 2015-2018 edition, p. 21.
Retrieved from http://www.trinitycollege.co.uk/resource/?id=6060 21 Jan 2017

R: *It's interesting for me because I only played like that once in my life. At a competition at Trinity in one of the lecture halls. Me and a trombonist entered the Gladys Putnick Memorial Competition for Extemporisation.*

I: *That could not sound any more formal! [laughs]*

R: *Yeah. It's unbelievable [laughs]. I don't think they had any brass players entering for the last number of years so one the guys judging said 'why don't you two give it a go?'. And they gave us a few pitches and you went away and worked on it for a few minutes and came back in the room and performed whatever you were going to perform in front of your peers and the adjudicator. So that's the only way I ever used that.* [07Troy07.08.16]

Troy's experience with this contest shaped his perceptions of the 'motivic' improvisation supporting test as being similar to Trinity College's annual extemporisation contest but unlike anything else he has experienced in his career as a first-call London session musician. He explained that since the assessment criteria was vague, he prepared Tim for the improvisation task by encouraging him to draw on real-world application of improvisation by presenting a range of musical contrasts, which Troy viewed as something that can be positively applied across many musical contexts. In practice, this was conveyed to Tim as a collection of improvisation ideas similar to using the *ideas template* that Sal developed with Chad (see Appendix I). Trumpet technique (articulation, tone, phrasing, dynamics) and practiced ii-V-I patterns used in their lesson warm-ups were integrated into the assessment strategies for earning "top marks":

The examiner's comments indicated to Troy and Tim that these strategies were successful:

> *Excellent use of the full range of the instrument. Creative development of the material. 10/10* [Appendix L]

Tim's "full range" of the trumpet, which the participants interpreted as referring to dynamics and register (high vs low pitches), and "Creative development of the material", which they interpreted as an acknowledgement of Tim's transpositions of the motif bring together all of the recent arguments and illustrate how the assessment of improvisation can be shaped through the differing perceptions of the

stakeholders. Drawing on the earlier findings that the task begins with an un-defined practice of improvisation as the basis of a vaguely-defined assessment before being interpreted by the instrumental music teacher who draws upon his own experiences (e.g. the Gladys Putnick Prize) and perceptions of improvisation to fill in the gaps. The teacher then bridged the ambiguous aspects of the test by drawing on improvisation strategies from his pedagogical practice to help prepare the student to improvise for an examiner with different perceptions/experiences of the improvisation. The examiner's comments were then used as validation of Tim's skill as a musician and Troy's skill as a teacher. However, beneath the surface of the validations, Troy perceived the assessment and the examiner's feedback as being without meaning. My observation was that the comments regarding the use of the full range of the instrument were anticipated and were used to shape Tim's perceptions of improvisation as an exhibition of contrasts.

While Troy may have perceived the assessment as being without meaning, Tim highlighted that the meaning of the *Supporting Test 2* was to give him a goal to focus on when practicing improvisation. Thus, the process leading up to the assessment was beneficial for giving Tim a goal to help structure his improvisation practice that did not detract from what he perceived to be the more important parts of the exam. The exam results then reaffirmed his perceptions and practices of improvisation.

The ABRSM Jazz Flute exemplar

The ABRSM Jazz Flute triad had different improvisation tasks than the two previous Trinity College examples but reaffirmed the arguments that (a) improvisation is perceived as requiring extra preparation and (b) the extra preparation is linked to teacher and student perceptions of a contextual distinction between improvisation in-and-out of graded music examinations.

Within the observed flute lessons, Heather perceived two categories of improvisation, the kind she practiced for enjoyment at home (often with a pop or folk song) and the kind she was preparing "for the exam". These perfectly align with my developing argument about the distinction between 'real' and 'inauthentic' contexts of improvisation. Flynn attempted to find a balance between what Heather needed to play for the examination and what she wanted to play so that her natural tendencies

(e.g. phrasing, rhythm) worked for her as "variations" and not against her as "mistakes". While this reaffirmed the contextual distinction between improvisation in-and-out of graded music examinations, it gave Flynn an opportunity to make Heather aware of how she could use her improvisation skills to satisfy both contexts.

For example, when preparing for the ABRSM Quick Study improvisation test, Heather and Flynn practiced repeating phrases by ear and improvising responses. Like the other teachers, Flynn developed improvisation strategies with his student (i.e. Sal's 'ideas template') such as the "call and response" they associated with the context and culture of 'the blues'. As with the practices of the other two teachers, Flynn began with an 'authentic' form of improvisation from his pedagogical practice and developed it for the specific context of the examinations.

> *So basically, the examiner will play some kind of groove and melody on the piano. It's, it's always very simple. Then your job is to respond. You just play something back to the examiner. That something is very short. Simple. Four bars long. It doesn't have to be mind-blowing... it does need to be is clear and rhythmically assertive. Listen to what the examiner plays. If they are playing mostly in crotchets, and you can feel the crotchets, then use that as the basis of your response. They are going to play rhythms that are clear for you to understand and you need to do the same. You need to make it known that you're confident and playing specific rhythms- crotchets, quavers, triplets, whatever, come in with the melodic statement. A strong melodic statement. For example, the song has the same rhythm throughout the first few bars. Just a little two-bar rhythm… (Flynn sings the rhythm). You can use that in your improvisation. Choose different notes but a similar rhythm…This is only worth a few points in the exam, but it could be the few points that separate you from getting the Distinction or the Merit.* [04Flynn14.06.16]

The lengthy complexities of the improvisation strategies (i.e. critical listening, strong melodic statements, calculated rhythmic variation) support the argument that improvisation options are perceived as requiring more hours of practice than the non-improvisation option for which it substituted.

As with the other exemplars, the candidate received positive-sounding feedback. However, it was unclear to Heather, her teacher and her mother exactly what the

comments meant. They addressed the same issue as the other participants, that due to the lack of specificity in the assessment language, they were unsure of why Heather received only 19 of 21 marks or what exactly the examiners comments meant. The following is what the examiner wrote (see Appendix L):

Sight Reading or Quick Study	The responses were fluent and prompt. Imaginative developments. There was scope for more nuanced musical shaping throughout.	19 of 21

While Flynn and Heather both appreciated the comment regarding "imaginative developments", they were unsure of what the examiner meant by "There was scope for more nuanced musical shaping throughout". They attempted to use the comments as a formative use of summative assessment but were unable because neither the exam candidate or her expert teacher understood what "nuanced musical shaping" was or how more could be added "throughout" to earn the additional two points. After first reading the comments, Flynn tried to rationalise the comments to Heather and her mother:

> *'Musical shaping' sounds like personalising. The way you phrase your notes. Whether you bend into them or how you articulate them. Maybe you played the same way through all of them and the examiner was looking to see you caress the notes a little more… So, like, [sings an example of a smooth phrase, then sings an example of the same phrase in which every note gets equal strong emphasis]. Like that. Maybe. I don't know.* [06Flynn12.07.16]

The participants thus perceived the improvisation option to have vague instructions and an assessment that was unclear and therefore lacking in meaning. Compared to the relatively clear sight-reading test and assessment for which it can optionally substitute, the improvisation option required more preparation (skills, strategies) and risk because neither the candidate nor the teacher could predict how the examiner would assess the test. After receiving the feedback, they were still not clear on how the examiner assessed the test. Flynn then did what the other participant teachers had to do, they attempted to construct meaning from the various sources including the vague language of the syllabus, the mysterious references in the examiner's

comments, their experiences with previous examinations, and the contexts/cultures of improvisation both inside and outside of graded music examinations.

4.4 Key Outcomes & Contributions to Knowledge

The lack of definitions and practices

First and foremost, this research found that neither the ABRSM nor TCL define 'improvisation' in their curricula and as a result, lack validity and meaning. Interviews with the syllabus authors confirmed that they did not have standard written definitions from which the syllabus authors and examiners could draw. The lack of standard definitions is a fundamental flaw in the assessments since it enables a testing environment in which (a) each examiner can have different definitions and perceptions than their colleagues; and (b) the definitions, practices and perceptions of improvisation are fixed and thus change without notification each time a new syllabus author replaces an outgoing one.[103] Backing the arguments that neither examination board makes consistently clear what they are assessing or how with a literature review of validity in contemporary European assessment standards, I concluded that ABRSM's and TCL's assessments of improvisation were without value on the grounds that a test that fails to assess what it claims to assess is not a valid assessment (see 2.4). The qualifications awarded for improvisation thereby fail to communicate an improvisation-specific value.

'Authentic' and 'artificial' improvisation

Stemming from the lack of definitions and related practices of improvisation, strong doubts were raised about the value of improvisation within the context of the exams due to a lack of real-world validity. Participant music teachers unanimously drew clear distinctions between what they perceived to be 'authentic' practices of improvisation that occurred in real-life music making (with rich links to music history, culture and social groups), and the 'artificial' practices of improvisation specifically

[103] As revealed in my interview with an ABRSM syllabus author, the last three people with the position of Chief of Syllabus have introduced new syllabuses with improvisation ('Practical Musicianship', 'Jazz Piano', then 'Jazz Horns' and 'Creative Musicianship'). TCL took over and rebranded Trinity Guildhall's jazz syllabuses and have over time made core changes under different executives.

developed for the context of graded music examinations. The participants (especially the teachers) doubted and challenged the ecological validity of the assessments on the grounds that the examinations assessed 'contrived' improvisation tasks rather than real-life practices. These distinctions were regularly communicated by the teachers and served to further undercut the meaning of the exams, the expertise of the examiners and the authority of the examination boards.

The boards' assessments have not been updated to adequately meet the needs of improvisation pedagogy

Evidence from the inter-case analyses of observation data revealed that the teachers maintained that the examination boards failed to update their assessments to meet the improvisation pedagogy. Document analyses supported their argument and showed that the improvisation tasks and repertoire included in the syllabuses were tailored to fit with pre-existing non-improvisation tests and marking rubrics rather than writing new assessment criteria to assess well-established naturally-occurring models and frameworks of improvisation.

Interviews with the teachers revealed a consensus that 'authentic' improvisation has lower and higher levels that are not reflected in the examination assessments. For example, performing memorised skills such as seeing 'Bb7' and responding by playing a Bb triad or Bb mixolydian scale were perceived to be lower-level improvisation whereas the higher levels of improvisation increasingly combined memorised skills with music theory and cultural frameworks. Analyses of the ABRSM and TCL marking rubrics supported the teachers' assertions and challenged the ecological validity of the assessments by demonstrating that the improvisation assessments were developed to reflect steadily increasing lengths and technical skills (e.g. Grade 2 requires a two-bar improvisation, but Grade 3 requires four bars)[104] rather than increasing sophistication.[105]

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[104] See ABRSM's Quick Study. Retrieved from: https://us.abrsm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/jazzQuickStudy11.pdf 29 Jan 2017

[105] This issue might be improved if the boards were to indicate increased improvisation challenges. For example, a Grade 1 jazz performance assessment might instruct candidates to improvise using notes from a specific scale from the technical section of their syllabus whereas a Grade 2 might instruct candidates to combine notes from a scale and an arpeggio from the technical section.

This also reveals an underlying assumption by both examination boards that improvisation develops in a linear progression through the different grade levels.[106] The disadvantage of which is the assumption that all students will progress linearly via a standard model towards the same goal (Salaman, 1994) rather than a more complex and personal process of selecting, organising and integrating information (Marín *et al.*, 2014) from different sources into novel musical contexts.

Exams with improvisation require additional learning time

There is a strong difference between the boards and the music teachers in regard to the amount of time required for learning improvisation. All of the case study participants (teachers, students, and parents) plus the jazz syllabus consultant stated unanimously that improvisation requires additional time to teach and practice. The difference in preparation required improvisation and non-improvisation syllabuses was exacerbated by the teachers' perceptions that an exam-specific 'artificial' improvisation needed to be taught as an extra subject in addition to the 'authentic' improvisation regularly practiced in music lessons. It therefore seemed ill-considered that the examination boards' Ofqual reports indicated that examinations with improvisation require the same amount of 'Guided Learning Hours' as those without improvisation (4.3.2.1). This goes against the experience and expert opinions of the teachers and the jazz syllabus that participated in this research as well as the findings from the observations and document analysis of this thesis.

This thesis breaks new ground because the pressures on the teachers to convey a perceived 'extra subject' (that contentiously lacks clear definitions and practices) in the same amount of time as the standard non-improvisation syllabuses have not been previously explored in the research literature. Nor has the possible inaccuracy of ABRSM's and TCL's Ofqual reports in regard to the 'Total Learning Time' of examinations requiring improvisation. These would be important topics for future research.

[106] If certain conditions were met (e.g. knowing the notes in a G mixolydian scale) then learning would occur (e.g. knowing when and how improvise using a G mixolydian scale).

Prestige over money: the perceived benefits of not defining improvisation

The interviews with examination board representatives revealed that they perceived the lack of specificity regarding improvisation within their curricula to be beneficial because it enabled a wider flexibility of interpretation of 'improvisation'. This would enable the syllabuses to appeal to the widest range of international customers. While this initially appeared to be congruent with my participant teachers' perceptions that the examination boards' main rationale for including improvisation was to increase financial profit, this position was later refuted in this thesis. A counter-argument grounded in my literature review (3.3.1.2, Appendix D) was generated that placed prestige as the currency of value. It was argued that improvisation is being represented and marketed as a product to generate prestige for the ABRSM and TCL as well as enabling an additional presence within instrumental music lessons (i.e. through ancillary books and preparations for an exam) rather than as a new money-spinning range of products (i.e. 2.3.2).

More specifically, the participant teachers argued that the examination boards were motivated to monetise improvisation and did not invest much thought or capital into providing an assessment in harmony with the teachers' pedagogical practices and perceptions of 'authentic' improvisation (4.3.2). I refuted this theory with evidence from ABRSM's and TCL's published reports of candidate numbers that indicated comparatively low numbers of candidate uptake compared to non-improvisation options. I confirmed this with the examination board executives, who clarified that they must balance musical decisions with financial decisions. While the boards maintain that they must eventually recoup their financial investments, they are more motivated by musical interests such as providing beneficial pedagogical tools and generating more influence, prestige and presence in the candidates' education (i.e. through related publications and pedagogical tools).[107]

Marketing 'creativity': placing buzzwords into rubric categories

This thesis argued that the boards' musical motivations regarding improvisation are dependent on corporate marketing practices rather than robust assessment

[107] I made no attempt to present the evidence disputing the money-spinner theory to the participants. Upon reflection, this was a missed opportunity to learn how strongly formed and fixed the teachers' perceptions of the examination boards' rationale for including improvisation.

language and examiner expertise. By establishing a framework based on research literature exploring marketing narratives and practices of educational institutions (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Fairclough, 2013; Saichaie, 2011), this thesis argued that the examination boards' inclusions of improvisation are used to develop *image*, *influence* and *competitiveness* rather than financial profit. The need for an educational institution to maintain a competitive advantage against other institutions offering similar products (e.g. London College of Music) encourages the ABRSM and TCL to stand out via distinctive images and brands while showing convincing evidence (e.g. links to prestigious conservatories, slogans, endorsements) that support their claim that they are the "world's leading" institution and provider of the best products (see Appendix C). Combining the argument that the examination boards shaped a perception of 'improvisation' as new prestigious products in order to stand out in competition with other institutions offering similar products (e.g. London College of Music exams) and the findings that the assessments of improvisation practices lack validity (4.2.2), it was concluded that assessment rubric descriptors, such as TCL's 'creativity and imagination', function more as marketing buzzwords than as meaningful assessment criteria based on clearly defined practices.

The ABRSM's influence on improvisation in teaching-and-learning environments creates a paradox for them. Whereas Trinity College have since their inception, maintained a goal to shape instrumental learning practices, the ABRSM has tried to maintain a distance from instrumental learning practices (see 2.1). The ABRSM executive explained that they were in the business of exams and had no say in what was being taught in lessons. The researcher disagreed with this view and provided evidence from the observations that prominently-branded materials including books, software and audio recordings published by the ABRSM were continually in use during the observed lessons and in the student's practice space at home. In response, the ABRSM executive made conflicting statements that (a) the ABRSM had nothing to do with teaching-and-learning; and (b) instrumental music teachers were "missing a trick" by not including improvisation in their lessons. The ABRSM was "telling them that" and "selling" the benefits of improvisation to the teachers and their candidates (4.3.1.2).

Based on strong and consistent data from the observations, interviews and document analyses, the argument is that both the ABRSM and TCL actively aim to embed themselves within instrumental music lessons in order to maintain and refine their brands through the introduction of ancillary products (i.e. books published by the boards), the shaping of lesson structures and content through syllabuses, the shaping of repertoire-related perceptions of taste, excellence and authenticity. Rather than assisting with the pedagogy of a musical practice, the examination boards use improvisation as a product and tool to attract and inculcate generations of instrumental music students and teachers.

Again, it is surprising that previous research has not investigated the marketing practices of the examination boards and their related publishing and selling of products and services for the 'grades' that they created.

Exams with improvisation may require paying for specialist private tutors

As discovered when searching for participants for this research (see 3.3.1.4), the major county-supported music services that place peripatetic music teachers into Cambridgeshire's public and private schools stated that while their teachers regularly prepare students for exams, none of their teachers reported that they were preparing students for graded examinations with improvisation. Subsequent interviews with Cambridge-based music teachers with experience and/or colleagues working for these music services provided accounts that there were pressures on the teachers to make sure the students are regularly engaged with graded examinations and achieve high marks. Increasing pressures clashes with the decreasing lesson times for students, resulting in teachers not having the time, incentives or clear assessment criteria. It was reported by both the music teachers and examination board executives that many teachers lacked experience and/or training with improvisation and were uncomfortable teaching it as well as lacking in incentive to upskill and add improvisation to their lessons.

While this research outcome is neither central to the main research questions nor conclusive, it brings attention to an uncharted area of music education in the UK: the increasing practice of paying for private tutors as part of norm of middle-class education (i.e. Russell, 2002). While the practice of engaging tutors specifically to

prepare students for UK music examinations has been reported in some Commonwealth countries, particularly in Asia (Bull & Scharff, 2017; Kok, 2011; Ross, 2009; Tye, 2004), no one has yet provided a thorough report on the business of private music tutors in the UK. This is most likely, to quote Russell's research on middle-class education norms, "…because it is in nobody's interest to collect it" (2002, p. 10).

The roles and professional activities of improvisation-specialist tutors is an unexplored and increasingly important twenty-first century topic. The evidence of this thesis suggests that as options for improvisation increase in the graded examinations, a supporting industry of improvisation teachers will develop that shifts improvisation from a basic element of music making (Ferand, 1965; Nettl, 2009) to a more-costly exam-centred endeavour available to those that can afford it. While this thesis has brought light to their contributions and perceptions of the instrumental graded music examinations, it remains a fertile topic for future enquiry.

4.5 Reflections and Recommendations

Through completion of this thesis I have come to realise that my introduction to improvisation growing up in the Southwestern United States had some important similarities to the pedagogical and performance practices I observed during my research in Cambridgeshire. Both involved a continually-expanding set of practiced skills (e.g. scales, licks & arpeggios) spontaneously combined with specific musical frameworks and cultural models (e.g. 'Motown soul or 1950's Cuban cha-cha). In my own story, I was in 'Band' class throughout secondary school but had to trade cartons of cigarettes for music lessons with the only improvisation expert in my home town. Similarly, the music students that I observed did not have access to improvisation in their school music programmes and therefore sought extra weekly lessons with specialist private teachers. One key difference was that while I learned improvisation entirely outside of a formal curriculum, the participants in my research engaged with improvisation in part through the prescribed structures of the graded music examinations.

When I first encountered graded music examinations as a new teacher in Ireland, I considered myself to be an expert on 'improvisation', yet I could not discern exactly what was meant by 'improvisation' in the contexts of the exams. Not knowing what the examiners would be listening for, my students' questions regarding how 'outside' they could play (i.e. intentional 'wrong' notes), how much they could subvert listeners' expectations or how many points the improvisations were worth in the exam could not be answered by me or my more-experienced colleagues. I encountered these same issues during my research in Cambridge suggesting that this is more than a local concern or phenomenon.

In addition, I found strong echoes of my professional experiences through how the lack of definitions, specified practices and clear assessment details discouraged music teachers from exploring improvisation options with their students. These problems, namely the uncertainty of what was being assessed and how, were exacerbated by external pressures such as parents' expectations and reflections on job performance. Teachers were reluctant to engage with different curricula that were unclear because they risked unpredictable and unexplainable results. In

addition, the average lengths of instrumental music lessons had been decreasing and teachers did not have the time or resources (e.g. student ensembles) to introduce and develop improvisation. I theorised that these issues were part of an ongoing concern with improvisation in music pedagogy, that the teachers had little or no experience with improvisation as students and were therefore not comfortable with teaching improvisation. As a result, their students were not being exposed to improvisation. Over time, should those students become teachers with no improvisation experience, they might likely perpetuate the status quo by not introducing improvisation to their students.

Being concerned and unclear about the emerging future of improvisation in instrumental music pedagogy, I investigated these issues through three research questions addressing (1) the *definitions* and *practices* of improvisation, (2) how improvisation was assessed in graded music examinations and (3) the perceptions of improvisation by the various examination stakeholders (see 2.2). The development of my strong methodology enabled me to gather reliable evidence to address my questions, to generate new knowledge of improvisation in pedagogical practices that prepare for graded examinations, and to provide a solid foundation for new research in overlapping fields of music education and curriculum studies.

4.5.1 Reflecting on the methodology.

The analytic focus of my research was a multiple-case study exploring improvisation within classical and jazz graded music examinations. This gave me an opportunity to develop a methodology for studying improvisation in naturally-occurring instrumental music lessons over time, enabling original insights into the evolving perceptions and practices of improvisation as influenced by the ABRSM and TCL examinations. The methodology was adapted from diverse sources, notably document analyses of music education curricula (i.e. Cremata, 2010; Babin, 2005), critical discourse analyses of how education institutions market themselves through their websites and syllabuses (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Saichaie, 2011), longitudinal observations of instrumental music lessons working towards a goal (i.e. Nerland,

2007; Davidson & Scutt, 1999) and interviews with observation participants and other key stakeholders (i.e. Seddon, 2005; Berry, 2002). In the following section, I will reflect on the successes and limitations of how well these diverse methods enabled me to collect and analyse data to best answer the research questions while maintaining high standards of research ethics.

Data analysis methods

The initial goals of my research were to develop new knowledge about how improvisation was *defined* (RQ 1), *practiced* (RQ 1) and *assessed* (RQ 2) in graded music examinations. To achieve these goals, I identified and collected a sample of document data based on methods and size derived from my review of relevant literature (see 3.3.1.4). The purposeful sampling of document data consisted of online material (prominent web pages and syllabuses) and printed syllabuses and examination supplements corresponding to the units of analysis within the multiple case study.

I originally planned to organise and code the documents with NVivo software. These plans were altered during my pilot study when I realised that the analyses of the visual content would be better aided by a clearer visual display (i.e. Saichaie, 2012). I thus developed a database through MindView software (see Appendix E) that enabled me to quickly go from macro to micro views of the data while still being able to search the textual content of each document. I am currently unaware of other research that used MindView to make visual maps to compare how information is presented to viewers through the websites of education institution. While this software tool did not allow for the efficient recall of themes associated with NVivo, it was a better choice because it allowed me to have a clearer and more compelling visual record of how perceptions of improvisation were shaped by the examination boards through the organisation of their websites and syllabuses.

Early in the research process, I added a third research question that investigated the stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation. This was prompted by data emerging from the pilot study interviews revealing that each stakeholder could have different perceptions of 'improvisation' and how 'improvisation' was situated within graded music examinations. Interpreting these data, I theorised that the teachers' and

students' perceptions of improvisation would develop and shift in the weeks leading up to an examination and then again after the exam. I therefore incorporated longitudinal observations of weekly music examination into my case study so that I could successfully elicit new knowledge regarding how perceptions of improvisation evolved over time in relation to the goal examinations and the teachers' pedagogical practices.

My observations located wider contextual resources involved in shaping improvisation during the music lessons such as books, institutional websites, software and recordings published by the ABRSM and TCL. Condensation analyses of the interviews and observations (i.e. Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015) successfully enabled a closer examination and greater understanding of the ways in which teachers' and students' shared representations improvisation were constructed through talk, examination materials, music performance and cultural models over time (see Appendix I). The use of condensation analysis made it possible to study the emergence and shaping of improvisation over time in relation to both instrumental pedagogy and in specific relation to graded music examinations. By foregrounding discussions of improvisation in instrumental music lessons, it revealed how shared meanings are shaped in relation to the recent and past histories of music examination boards.

Evaluation of the methodology

The methodology of this thesis largely drew from doctoral researchers based in North America (e.g. Menard, 2015; Cremata, 2010) because they were the most relevant to mine in terms of focus and scope. I then refined my methodology through a review of smaller-scale research studies conducted in the UK or other Commonwealth countries (Appendix A). Since graded music examinations have received minimal research and that the topic of 'improvisation' within them has received none, the methodology that I developed for this thesis can be viewed as a template for future research (see 4.5.2).

The methodology allowed me to successfully observe how improvisation was shaped by dialogue that invoked the social and cultural contexts of the students and their teachers. It follows that researchers using a socio-cultural framework could use my

methodology to observe the development of new ideas in music lessons as well as how those ideas are brought forward, negotiated between participants through talk and music performance, and sometimes dropped.

Whereas analysis of isolated moments (i.e. brief dialogue and music performance) can reveal moment-by-moment events, these events may be interpreted differently when considered in context with the longer-term conversation. By combining the micro-analysis of specific content with macro-analysis of how practices and perceptions were constructed over time, I was able to extract a more-complete ecological story revealing how aspects of improvisation was raised, negotiated and occasionally dropped in relation to the graded examination.

The methodology did have potential challenges. Specifically:

(a) While the longitudinal data collection and analyses were extremely valuable for developing and providing evidence for new theories, the process was very time-consuming. I had available time to invest into the research, but I would advise other researchers following my methodology to not underestimate the time required for the Condensation Analysis (see Appendix I);

(b) The observations of music lessons were susceptible to unexpected time or date changes due to occasional rescheduling (e.g. the student had a sports match during the regular lesson time). During my observations, I had two lessons rescheduled to adjacent days (e.g. Wednesday at 4:30pm moved to Thursday at 5pm). Anticipating that a lesson might be moved to a time in which I could not attend, I had made plans for the teacher to conduct the audio recording without me being present. Fortunately, this was not required during my research because I was able to attend each of the observations;

(c) Being that the settings of the observations were in private teaching studios or the participants' homes, I was unable to control the environment (e.g. placing chairs in an exact position). I had anticipated this when designing the case since I specifically wanted to observe and record naturally-occurring phenomena and real-world practices (see 3.2.1). Researchers seeking to

explore improvisation in a more-controlled environment should be warned of the occasional unpredictability of environments where some private instrumental music lessons occur and to prepare by considering in advance what to do if a lesson is rescheduled, cancelled or interrupted (e.g. a doorbell, telephone ringing or a parent walking into the room to ask their child a question).

Methodology and researcher subjectivity

As discussed earlier, I first learned about music in environments without graded music examinations. Later, I was surprised to discover the graded music exams' dominant influence in the cultures in which I taught in Ireland in addition to my increasing knowledge of their global influences. My past professional and educational experiences influenced my methodological design. They also strongly influenced my decision to focus on private instrumental music lessons. In addition, my initial contact with Cambridgeshire-based instrumental music teachers and music hub executives informed me that very few music teachers engage with improvisation in Cambridgeshire classroom music or in peripatetic lessons. This suggested to me that my Irish experiences with improvisation in graded music examinations and instrumental pedagogy were comparable to the professionals whom I initially contacted in Cambridgeshire.

Research on graded music examinations has primarily focused on piano candidates (e.g. Babin, 2005; Tye, 2004) with a few exceptions that mention violin candidates (e.g. Davidson & Scutt, 1999). Being a woodwind and brass specialist with comparatively little interest in piano or violin pedagogy, I chose to focus on woodwind and brass. In addition to better aligning with my interests and professional experiences, I felt it was important to generate new knowledge by focusing on instrumentalists that were previously absent from the graded examination research literature (trumpet, flute and saxophone). During the initial design of my methodology, I strongly considered including 'piano' and 'jazz piano' as a fourth exemplar in the case study but decided against it because a fourth instrument and teaching-and-learning triad would be beyond the scope of this thesis. Moreover, I wanted the focus of my research to be fresh rather than an extension of the previous

piano examination research. While my methodology could be used to investigate piano pedagogy and improvisation in piano music examinations (e.g. TCL Piano versus TCL Jazz Piano), observations of piano lessons would not have made a worthwhile impact on the reliability of my research outcomes.

My research participants were aware of my professional identity as well as the reputation of the University of Cambridge. Upon reflection, these recognitions may have influenced willingness and interest in participating in my research. For example, the participant teachers spoke to me as an insider to music improvisation and the instrumental teaching profession. As a result of my familiarity with the content, I was more integrated into their communities than a non-expert outside observer would likely have been. There was a danger with this insider status that I might influence the content of the music lessons that I wanted to observe. On several occasions I had to remind the teachers that my role was as an outside researcher and therefore unable to converse freely about my opinions about their music lessons or syllabus content because it might influence their music lessons. In balance, my familiarity and quasi-insider status allowed me access to the specific improvisation-related data that I aimed to collect but I do not believe this impacted the reliability or validity of the results.

When analysing the data and making field notes during observations and interviews, my decisions were informed by my knowledge of improvisation, music theory, specific music instruments (flute, saxophone & trumpet) and the content of the ABRSM and TCL syllabuses and tune books. For example, I was able to distinguish how new challenges arose from the student instrumentalists' interpretations of the curricula and how those challenges were addressed by their teachers. Any repeats of my research or reuses of my methodology would need to bear in mind my particular musical knowledge.

When designing the observations, I debated whether to record the participants with audio-only or a video recorder. While the majority of the related methodological research literature used video to provide moment-by-moment data (see 3.3.2.4), I instead decided to use an audio recorder and make fieldnotes. Upon reflection, I am pleased with this choice because it allowed me to be less intrusive while providing

the specific data that I required. My pilot study confirmed that audio recording provided the necessary data and that video recording would not have enhanced my findings. Reflecting upon my experiences conducting the observations, I note that using video in the homes of teenage students may have been an ethically unsound choice because I would have perceived the experiences as being awkward and uncomfortable.

4.5.2 Recommendations for future research.

The research contained in this thesis aimed to establish new knowledge about the definitions, practices and perceptions of improvisation in graded music examinations. Due to the specific scope of a PhD thesis, the final product was limited to two examination boards and in-practice exemplars of only three instrumental teaching-and-learning triads near Cambridge. While the results of this thesis might be informative for the pedagogical practices of improvisation in different socio-economic classes and on a larger scale, national-level research would be needed to provide a more robust picture of how improvisation is being practiced in instrumental pedagogy. Since the graded examination boards operate globally, studies of how the formal assessment of improvisation in local non-UK pedagogical and performance practices would enable examination boards, policy makers and music education scholars to make improvements benefiting local learning and unencumbering them from the hegemony of London-based examination boards.

The methodology used in this thesis has the potential to be adapted by researchers to investigate how specific musical skills, challenges and assessment tasks are communicated and shaped through instrumental music lessons. The methods and findings indicate other possibilities for analysing musical collaboration and pedagogical practices. For example, syllabus criteria such as sight reading or learning to perform a melody could be analysed over time as developed in music lesson by a student and teacher. Since this thesis was limited to three instruments and two genres, additional researchers could use my methodology to investigate additional instruments (e.g. piano) and genres (e.g. Trinity's Pop and Rock).

Similarly, the methodology of this thesis could be used to investigate improvisation in other examination boards, such as pop/rock syllabuses offered by Rock School and the London College of Music.

Further useful investigations of improvisation in graded music examinations that stem from my research include:

- a survey of UK county music hubs/peripatetic teacher providers inquiring how many of their teachers are actively teaching improvisation and how many are teaching improvisation specifically for a graded music examination. Being that my research found that none of the teachers working in my local county music hub reported preparing students to improvise for examinations, a survey that investigates peripatetic teachers' reasons (i.e. unfamiliarity with improvisation, lack of time and/or confidence, external pressures, vague assessment criteria) could be used to improve the availability and practices of improvisation in music lessons;

- further critical discourse analysis of the marketing narratives created by the examinations boards and used on their websites and in promotional materials. My research found that both the ABRSM and TCL convey improvisation more like a product with associated buzzwords such as 'creativity' and 'imagination' rather than as a clear musical process. Further research into how their marketing shapes perceptions of improvisation as well as associated stereotypes could link to the popularity or unpopularity of improvisation within specific sets of examination candidates (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity);

- an investigation of how the examination boards determine the Guided Learning Hours and Total Qualification Time that they report to the UK Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual). My research indicated that both the ABRSM and TCL submitted to Ofqual that these exams, where a student improvises, required the same amount of preparation as comparable exams (i.e. same grade and same instrument) where the

candidates do not improvise. This was unanimously disputed by the teachers and students that I interviewed and observed;

- further exploration of how graded music examiners feel about the improvisation curricula that includes perceptions of their training to make expert assessments. My research found that the examination boards claim their examiners do not need to have improvisation expertise to accurately assess improvisation. The examiners' perspectives could give greater insight into their confidence in the examination systems that are of growing influence on improvisation pedagogy in the UK;

- a comparative study of instrumental teaching-and-learning practices that explores (a) practices in which examination candidates are taught to improvise during the performance section of a graded music exam and (b) practices in which candidates perform memorised solos for the performance section of their exam. My research found evidence that memorising solos might be a common practice. While memorising solos seems to go against what my participant teachers and exam board executives perceived as the point of improvisation, memorising solos is not against the rules and can be viewed as an efficient and secure strategy for achieving a high mark on a graded music examination. My finding that both boards declare to Ofqual that exams with improvisation require no more Guided Learning Hours than exams without improvisation could be used to argue that the current assessments encourage candidates to perform memorised solos rather than learning to create spontaneous improvisations; a situation that goes entirely against what my participants expected from the examinations.

- an investigation of *if and how* music students of different socio-economic backgrounds can engage with improvisation as positioned by the graded music examinations. As demonstrated in my findings, improvisation was not being taught by the main Cambridgeshire music services and many peripatetic teachers because they lacked the time and/or incentives for

including it. As a result, students interested in learning improvisation paid specialist tutors for hour-long weekly lessons in preparation for their examinations. Such lessons with specialists might not be available depending on region and/or economic disadvantages.

4.5.3 Final thoughts

Recalling my discussion of 'improvisation' from the literature review (2.3), my findings reaffirm that improvisation is "far from being a minor, mystical, exceptional practice, improvisation is a basic part of most musical creativity" (Nettl, 2009, p. 3) and that spontaneous creative music making has been a feature of human activity throughout human history (Ferand, 1965). My research has made it apparent that the graded music examinations and related instrumental music education have been neglected and/or are behind on the inclusion of this essential component of music making.

The music teachers in my research unanimously related positive stances towards improvisation. They mentioned the values in enhancing music performance, developing and applying music theory, ear training abilities, developing technical skills (scales, rhythms, arpeggios) in addition to developing skills for creating and communicating. Despite the teachers' positive positions, improvisation activities have been marginalised compared to other musical activities (i.e. Niknafs, 2013a). Previous research has found that this was partially related to a lack of confidence in music teachers who were inexperienced with improvisation (Niknafs, 2013b, Fairfield, 2010) and that teachers given extra training were more likely to include improvisation in their classrooms (Niknafs, 2013a, Fairfield, 2010, Orman, 2002). My research has shown that the formal structures, uncertainties and pressures of instrumental music examinations can contribute to teachers' lack of confidence and the inclusion of improvisation in instrumental music lessons.

The examination board executives that I interviewed agreed that improvisation was vital for developing musicianship, acknowledging that it was an integral part of music

history and unfortunately neglected in most of their curricula throughout the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century. My research has shown that despite the boards' recognitions of these issues, their attempts to include improvisation in their examinations have lacked clarity, conformity and meaning. As a result, the boards' efforts to include improvisation have not aligned with the expectations of the music teachers and students.

My research has revealed an irony that the boards' inclusions of improvisation have in many instances discouraged improvisation in music lessons. This is because teachers and students are uncertain of how improvisation is being assessed and/or are discouraged by the extra hours of preparation they associate with the examination improvisation tasks. Thus, teachers may be dissuaded from including improvisation due to their lack of comfort with the topic and/or the uncertainties surrounding improvisation options within the high-pressures of instrumental music examinations.

It is my hope that the outcomes of my dissertation will be used to bring a greater understanding of the gap between examination stakeholders regarding improvisation and thereby aid music teachers, scholars and examination boards to successfully promote improvisation in instrumental music education. While disseminating my research at UK academic conferences, I have been encouraged by the attendance and interest of overwhelmingly younger audience members whose memories of graded music examinations and conservatory life are still very recent. My interactions with these audience members, and their requests for preliminary drafts of my findings, have given me the most hope for the impact of my research because they are the next generation of instrumental music teachers, graded music examiners, and music researchers whom will challenge and hopefully improve the assessments of improvisation in graded music examinations.

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Appendix A. Review of Music Curriculum Case Study Methodologies

When designing the case study presented in section 3.2, I made a review of the most relevant methodologies of recent research. While this review of methodologies helped me focus on the best ways to answer my research questions, the length of the review distracted from the flow of the methodology. Since several of the key studies are referenced in the methodology, I have included this methodology review in the appendix so that those wishing to replicate or interrogate my research can better understand my choices.

Throughout this section, I will present and critically evaluate the key case studies that most-closely relate to my research in order to strengthen and clarify my case study design. It emerges that case studies of music curriculum, particularly those of graded music examinations, are small in number and often lack key details. Many of the studies that I must draw upon for their close relation to my own research fail to clearly identify their cases, the case boundaries and/or the exact units of analysis; leaving the reader to make their own interpretations.

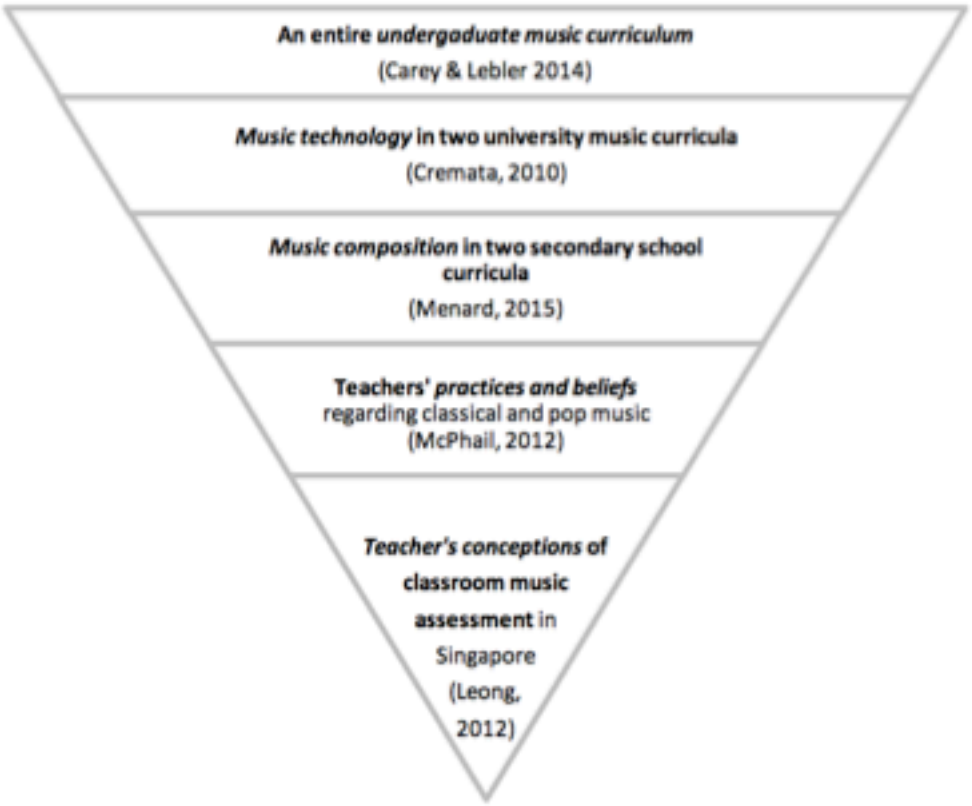
My original search criteria for case studies were that they (1) *are labelled as a 'case study'* in either in the title or the body of the work and that they (2) *focus on a music curriculum*. From the resulting list, I narrowed the studies by searching for those that (3) *bring the most relevant and useful knowledge to my research*. The case studies on music curriculum that bring the most-relevant and useful knowledge are shown in the following table (Table 10). The relevance of each study and its impact on my research will be critically explored throughout this section.

Table 10 Case study literature with 'Music Curriculum' as the case.

Year	Author	The Case	Unit of Analysis	Boundaries	Methods
2015	Menard	*Music Composition* as prescribed in US secondary music curriculum (multi-case study with 2 cases with different contexts).	Teacher and student perceptions.	Regular US high school music classes (One site had a typical US band programme and the other had an 'accelerated program' with a symphonic ensemble).	Mixed Methods: Interviews w/ teachers & students, observations of music classes & Participant journals. Quantitative methods were attitude surveys (students) & assessment of compositions.
2012	Carey & Lebler	The *curriculum* of a Bachelor of Music programme at an Australian conservatory.	Comments relating to individual course modules.	Conservatory instrumental and theory classes (regarding preparation for the modern world).	Document analysis, focus groups, observations, interviews & questionnaires with teachers, students and curriculum executives.
2012	McPhail	Although the author begins with 6 cases (6 different teachers), the analysis uses three cases focusing on the practices and beliefs of three music teachers.	Anything related to the *practices* and *beliefs* regarding the place afforded classical and popular music.	Secondary school music classes in New Zealand. Pop and classical music cultures.	Observations, interviews and focus groups involving teachers and/or students.
2012	Leong	The *conceptions* of classroom assessment held by Singaporean music teachers.	Q-set statements related to music teachers' conceptions of assessment.	Primary, secondary and third level music teaching environments.	Q- methodology and analysis with teachers.
2010	Cremata	*Music technology* as prescribed in university music curriculum. A multi-case study with four cases divided between two sites (2+2).	Individual *perceptions and experiences* of teachers, students and executives related to music technology.	Different university-level instrumental and composition music classes.	Document analysis, observations of music lessons & interviews with teachers, students and executives.
1994	Shepherd & Vulliamy	*'Englishness'* in a music curriculum.	Individual policy proposals.	The entire 1994 UK National Music Curriculum.	Document analysis of curriculum, newspaper reports & speeches.

Case variety: from broadest to narrowest.

Table 10 on the previous page presents the case literatures that were critically evaluated beginning with the broader-spanning cases and narrowing down to the more-focused cases. Beginning with Carey & Lebler's (2012) study of an *entire music curriculum* at a classical music conservatory, I will narrow the scope to case studies focusing on *specific subjects within a music curriculum* such as Menard's (2015) and Cremata's (2010) investigations of *composition* within specific college music departments. Narrowing further to the level of the individual were Leong's (2012) case study of the *conceptions of assessment held by classroom music teachers*, which was complimented by McPhail's (2012) PhD thesis on the beliefs and practices of six secondary school music teachers regarding the places afforded popular and classical music within the curriculum.



Carey & Lebler's (2012) broad case study of the Queensland Conservatory

The broadest cases are found in Carey & Lebler's (2012) case study *an entire music programme* at the Queensland Conservatorium. The authors of this study were senior lecturers at the conservatory and tasked with guiding the overhaul of the

entire Bachelor of Music curriculum. Aiming to make the Bachelor of Music degree more in tune with the modern music industry, Carey and Lebler used recent-graduate feedback forms, benchmarking with similar institutions (through comparing curricula) as well as interviews and questionnaires with current teachers, students and university executives to evaluate the curriculum. The study had a strong spirit of action research running throughout; which is especially-pronounced as the emerging results were being gradually phased-in to the curriculum over a period of four years.

Research	Case notes	Unit of analysis	Key relevance to my research	Key differences to my research
Carey & Lebler, 2012	A very broad case: The *curriculum* of a Bachelor of Music programme at an Australian classical music conservatory	Individual course modules. (While these are useful and have inherent boundaries, the authors provided few details or comparisons.	The methods provide a template for investigating across a broad range of curricula, instruments and skill levels in a classical music conservatory.	My research explores more cases (3 organisations instead of 1) and explores each case and unit of analysis in greater depth. Also, I am not exploring non-improvisation curricula.

Summary of Carey and Lebler, 2012

Having clearly established their case as the undergraduate music programme, Carey & Lebler failed to clearly specify their unit(s) of analysis. From the study, I discerned that the unit of analysis were individual syllabus programmes/courses such as *Year 3 Semester 2 Music Literature*. This study lacked a detailed analytical comparison between the modules forming the unit of analysis. For example, the 'most significant' finding based on student evaluations revealed:

> *…general dissatisfaction among staff and students with offerings in music theory, aural and music literature courses and the number of credit points (50 each) required in these areas… (p. 420)*

Instead of detailing what issues were at the core of the stakeholders' dissatisfaction, we are provided with the conclusion that:

> *…the required levels of music theory and aural proficiency and music literature should be achievable within the context of 40 CPs [credit points] …more advanced*

> *theory and aural courses and music literature courses should be provided as electives (p. 420-421)*

No data sets were presented and therefore a critical account of each unit of analysis such as what was found to be outdated, why it was outdated and what will be done to address the content, were not justified. Instead, Carey & Lebler transitioned from a presentation of the music syllabus to research findings recommending a change in the electives credit points (CPs) scheme. Thus, the depth of the case study, how much comparison and what type of comparisons occurred between the modules, as well as the role conservatoire politics played in creating the noticeable gap between their methodology and the conclusions were not clear.

While Carey & Lebler's research is useful to the design of my case study because it does present a template for analysing a music curriculum that increases in difficulty levels (such as graded examinations), my research differs from Carey & Lebler's in the scope of the phenomenon of interest. Whereas, their single case was one entire curriculum in depth (every instrument and option offered) at one conservatoire, my research is more expansive in that it explores two cases (ABRSM & TCL) while at the same time having a more focused scope that explores a specific aspect of the curriculum, *assessable improvisation*, with more detail than Carey and Lebler provide.

Noting that Carey and Lebler considered every module offered by the Queensland Conservatory's undergraduate programme, the question arises if it is necessary for me to do the same with my exploration of graded music examinations. I concluded that since my research questions focused specifically on improvisation, it was unnecessary to conduct a detailed analysis on all the non-improvisation curricula. For example, the ABRSM's *classical* curriculum contains no requirements for the practice or assessment of improvisation, whereas the ABRSM 'Jazz' curriculum does. There is currently no syllabus presented by the ABRSM or TCL offering vocal improvisation. Consequently, I decided to exclude vocal syllabuses from my research because it would be both tangential from my research questions and beyond the scope of this thesis.

Further Case Refinement: Menard (2015) and Cremata (2012)

I further distilled my case from the broadness of *an entire music curriculum* (Carey & Lebler 2014) to a *specific aspect within an entire music curriculum* by drawing upon two US-based studies: Cremata's (2010) PhD thesis whose cases focus on *music technology* within the music curriculum of two US-based universities and Menard's (2015) cases focusing on *music composition* in the curriculum of two US secondary schools.

Menard's study used identified mixed methods of data collection to locate challenges to implementing composition instruction in US high school classes. The most prominent findings were that composition classes were significantly and unevenly impacted by culture traditions, time, research setting, teacher preparation and lack of fundamental knowledge. A concise overview of Menard's multi-case study and how it influences mine is provided below:

Research	The Case	Units of analysis	Relevance	Key differences	Relevance of findings
Menard (2015)	*Music Composition* within US secondary music curriculum (multi-case study with 2 cases with different contexts).	(1) Teacher perceptions and (2) student perceptions relating to composition classes.	Menard's study provides a clear template for exploring one aspect of a broad music curriculum. It also uses Yin's (2014) multiple case research design with embedded units of analysis.	This study neglects to relate how each teacher taught the required composition tasks.	Major themes involving the challenges of implementing composition instruction can be applied to my coding: performance culture traditions, time, class setting, teacher preparation, and lack of student fundamental musical knowledge.

An important and influential aspect of Menard's study is its use of two cases to explore different contexts in different university music education programmes. This served as a potential model for my case study design. The difference being that I needed to include separate units of analysis to explore *Jazz* and *Classical* curricula within the two cases (*ABRSM & TCL*).

Another closely-related case study, the PhD thesis of Cremata (2010) explored *the uses of music technology* as prescribed in university music curriculum. Similar to my research, the Cremata thesis uses the methods of interviews, field observations and the analysis of documents to critically determine how a contemporary aspect of a music curriculum is carried out and how stakeholders perceive the phenomena. In addition to using the same methods as my research so study a comparable topic, Cremata, used a collective case study design (four cases occurring at two separate sites).

Research	The Case	Units of analysis	Key relevance to my research	Differences	Relevance of findings
Cremata (2010) PhD thesis	*The uses of Music technology* as prescribed in university music curriculum. Four cases divided between two sites (2+2).	Individual (1) *perceptions and (2) experiences* of teachers, students and executives related to music technology.	Being a PhD thesis with similar methods (interviews, field observations, and a collection of artefacts) and focus, this provides an excellent example of the sense of scale of previous PhD research. Like my study, Cremata uses multiple cases, units of analysis over multiple sites.	This study focuses on university music students. One-to-one instrumental lessons and parents are not considered.	A division between *learning* and *incorporating* music technology was found. This prompts me to look for a similar distinction regarding improvisation in my investigation. teacher training programmes.

Cremata's use of four cases to investigate four separate cohorts of music education majors. The four cases are evenly divided between two different sites (separate colleges) and are bounded by their naturally occurring times and environments. Thus, from Cremata it can be seen how four cases focusing on an aspect of contemporary music curricula fits the span of a PhD thesis. I debated using Cremata's four-cases model but decided against it since pairs of cases (i.e. TCL Jazz and TCL Classical) would share examiners and syllabus authors. This reinforced my decision to use two units of analysis (Jazz & Classical) within one

case (TCL) because my research focuses on separate curricula, not separate examiners and syllabus authors within the same examination board.

To address my third research question, which interrogates *stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation in graded music examinations*, I drew upon two other studies presented in Table 10: McPhail's (2012) case study of the practices and beliefs regarding the places afforded classical and popular music in a New Zealand Secondary school and Leong's (2012) case study of the conceptions of classroom assessment held by music teachers in Singaporean schools.

Refining the case to include individual stakeholders

The study by McPhail (2012a) is an excerpt from his PhD thesis (2012b) that explores the beliefs and practices of six secondary school music teachers regarding the places afforded popular and classical music within the national curriculum. The author conducted observations of music classes, interviews with the teachers (pre- and post-observations) as well as focus group interviews of students (n=75).

Research	The Case	Key relevance to my research	Differences	Relevance of findings
McPhail (2012a)	Three cases focusing on the practices and beliefs of three music teachers.	This study uses a socio-cultural framework to focus on teacher and student beliefs and practices as evidenced through music lessons. In addition, it explores difference between classical and popular music in both the classroom and the stakeholder's background.	This study was designed to present its findings using an *educational futures* framework (Young & Muller, 2010) and thus assumes three teaching style caricatures.	This study makes important connections between aspects of informal knowledge and conceptual knowledge. This is particularly relevant where the reframing of informal knowledge is susceptible to socio-cultural influences.

McPhail concluded that the music teachers acted as re-contextualising agents that adapted the official guidelines provided by the state curriculum. This includes re-contextualising theoretical, procedural and informal music knowledge with discourses from both music and education contexts (p. 43). The educational and

music values of the teachers as well as the contexts in which they work were shown to be pivotal in their students' experiences (p. 37).

Leong's (2012) PhD thesis researched the conceptions of classroom assessment held by Singaporean music teachers. 28 teachers were studied over two months for the purpose of this paper. Leong showed that conceptions of assessment were not fixed and were "irreducibly situated in a specific context" (p. 464). Leong's research also demonstrated how music teachers may resist new ideas or struggle to find a form of assessment that resonates with them. This study was influential to my research because it provided a useful model of how different conceptions of music compete and position themselves which illustrated how stakeholders' conceptions of assessment are situated within specific contexts.

Using the literature to determine the cases for this thesis

Prominent case study theory refers to the use of more than one case in the same study as a *collective case study* (Stake, 2006) or a *multiple-case study*[108] (i.e. Yin, 2014; Stake, 2006; Robson, 2002). A *collective/multiple*-case study design is used to enable researchers to explore similarities and differences between collectively-designed cases such as my exploration of the ABRSM's and TCL's improvisation curricula. Their common argument in favour of using multiple cases is that evidence arising independently from more than one case can be more compelling and robust by increasing the inter-reliability and validity of the study (Yin, 2014; Robson, 2002).

The use of more than one case to increase robustness and reliability is not without contention. There is a theoretical argument that using more than one case is akin to the rationale behind a controlled experiment with a repeated design of slightly varied contexts rather than the case-study rationale of studying a particular phenomenon in its naturally-occurring environment (i.e. Yin, 2014 and Stake, 2006). In the research of Cremata (2010), Menard (2015) and Carey & Lebler (2012), all of their cases were

[108] I will use the term 'collective case study' throughout this thesis because it is less confusing to many readers than 'multiple-case study'.

conceived and analysed as separate and naturally-occurring rather than as controlled experiments with repeated designs under slight varied contexts.

Another look at the key case study literature presented earlier in Table 10 reveals that most of the key studies used more than one case in their methodological design. For example, Menard's (2015) study of *music composition* in secondary school curriculum explores two cases occurring at two different sites (1+1). Cremata's (2010) PhD thesis has a greater length and explores four cases occurring at two different sites (2+2) in more depth. In both of these examples, the authors chose a collective-case design in order to explore their phenomenon of interest in different contexts because they argued it would allow them to gain a better understanding their phenomena of interest.

An important breadth vs. depth contrast can be discerned from a comparison of the collective cases of Menard (2015) collective case study of *Music Composition* within US secondary music curriculum in two sites to Carey & Lebler's (2012) study of a single case in one site (the Queensland Conservatorium). Carey and Lebler's single case of an entire undergraduate music programme is broader than the class-sized collective cases explored by Cremata or Menard. Unfortunately, while Carey and Lebler aimed to conduct an exhaustive in-depth study of the entire curriculum as it occurs at one specific site, their article is unclear regarding how deeply they explored their case because their data and analysis are thinly presented. Menard's (2015) collective design uses two smaller-sized cases (composition in the curriculum) at two different sites and successfully provides more in-depth support for their findings than Carey & Lebler's article with a similar word count. Thus, by narrowing down the phenomenon of interest, Menard was able to present more data, more analysis and arrive at a more compelling conclusion than the single case presented by Carey & Lebler's (2012).

Similar to Menard's (2010) journal article, Cremata (2010) explored a phenomenon of similar size (*the uses of Music technology* as prescribed in university music curriculum.). Having more space in a PhD dissertation than a journal article, Cremata focused on four cases occurring at two sites. Cremata's thesis (two sample sets from two separate schools) provides an excellent model for the expansiveness of data

analysis and the presentation of findings needed for the format of a successful PhD thesis on a comparable topic to my own. Drawing from Cremata and Menard (2010), I included two cases with two units of analysis (a 2 x 2 design instead of 4 x1) in my methodological design to establish sufficient breadth and depth expected for a PhD dissertation. Further details about the cases and units of analysis are provided in section 3.2.1.2.

Appendix B. Critical Discourse Analysis Rubrics

Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2011) Visual Analysis Rubric

Visual feature	Explanation	Data
Descriptors	A basic description of the visual elements such as: actors and carriers; angle; colours; graphics; font; page design; perspective; settings; spatial relationships.	
Actor	The active participant(s) in an action process is the participant(s) from which the vector emanates, or which is fused with the vector.	
Goal	The passive participant in an action process is the participant at which the vector is directed.	
Interactors	The participants in a transactional action process where the vector could be said to emanate from, *and* be directed at, both participants.	
Reacter	The active participant in a reaction process is the participant whose look creates the eye-line.	
Transactional reaction	An eye-line vector connects two participants, a Reacter and Phenomenon.	
Non-transactional reaction	An eye-line vector emanates from a participant, the Reacter, but does not point at another participant.	
Setting	The setting of a process is recognizable because the participants in the foreground overlap and hence partially obscure it; (e.g. soft focus, over/under colour saturation) and overall darkness or lightness between foreground and background.	
Means	A process used to create image (e.g. photograph, graphic, logo).	
Symbolic Attributes	Symbolic Attributes are made salient in the representation in one way or another. For instance, by being placed in the foreground, through exaggerated size, through being especially well lit, through being represented in fine detail or sharp focus, or through their conspicuous colour or tone	
Symbolic Suggestive	Symbolic Suggestive depictions are not represented as a general essence rather than a specific instance. Visuals of this nature may use soft focus, blending of colours, outlines or silhouettes.	
Sequencing of information.	Sequence sets up cause and effect. Placement of images on a page (e.g. high, low).	

Based on Saichaie's (2011, p. 119) use of Kress & van Leeuwen (2006).

Janks' (2005) Linguistic Rubric (critical discourse analysis)

Linguistic feature	Explanation	Data
Lexicalization	The selection/choice of wordings. Different words construct the same idea differently.	
Over-lexicalisation	Many words for the same phenomenon.	
Lexical cohesion	Created by synonymy, antonymy, repetition, and collocation.	
Euphemism	Hides negative actions or implications.	
Transitivity	Processes in verbs: are they verbs of?	
	• *doing*: action and material processes	
	• *being or having:* relational processes	
	• thinking/feeling/perceiving: mental	
	• *saying:* verbal processes	
	• *physiological:* behavioural processes	
	• existential: experiential	
Voice	Active and passive voice constructs participants as *actors* or as *reactors* to actions.	
	Passive voice allows for the deletion of the agent.	
Nominalisation	A process is turned into a thing or an event without participants or tense or modality. Central mechanism for reification.	
Quoted speech	Direct speech (DS) Indirect speech (IS)	
Mood	Is the clause a statement, question, offer or command?	
Modality	Social authority and degrees of uncertainty Modality created by modals (may, might, Could, will), adverbs (possibly, certainly, hopefully) intonation, tag questions.	
Pronouns	Inclusive: we/exclusive we/you	
	Us and them: othering pronouns	
	Sexist/non-sexist pronouns: generic "she"	
	The choice of first/ second/third person.	
Sequencing of information Logical connectors: conjunctions set up the logic of the argument.	Sequence sets up cause and effect. Conjunctions are: • *Additive:* and, in addition	
	• *Causal:* because, so, therefore	
	• Adversative: although, yet	
	• *Temporal:* when, while, after, before	

Based on Saichaie's (2011, p. 119) use of Janks, (2005, pp. 101-102).

The following tables are excerpts from my critical analysis of the institutional websites of (1) the ABRSM and (2) TCL. They depict how the banners on the Home Page of each website were analysed through the use of the two rubrics presented on the previous pages.

Table 11 Analysis of web banners.

ABRSM: Textual	Visual (logos & photos)	links:	Combined meaning
Banner 1 'ABRSM's £2.50 book sale has begun! Rediscover classic repertoire at really low prices'	Brightly-coloured sheet music books against a yellow background. 'Classic repertoire' such as 'Funfare for Horn' is presented as vibrant-looking products.	'Shop Page'	Banner one, which is the first banner visitors see, advertises a sale on vibrantly-presented old books. Improvisation is not included with 'classic repertoire'.
Banner 2 'Welcome to ABRSM. We are the exam board of the Royal Schools of Music'	An interior photo of two ethnically diverse actors, a boy and a girl, smiling at each other while seated next to a keyboard.	'About Page'	The banner associates ABRSM with the Royal Schools of Music and ethnically-diverse happy children. There is no overt reference to improvisation.
Banner 3 'Welcome to ABRSM. We are a charity committed to inspiring achievement in music'	An interior photo of two ethnically diverse boys in an orchestra rehearsal playing trumpets. In the background is a vibraphone and a boy playing French horn.	'About Page'	The 3rd banner associates ABRSM with non-profit status (charity) along with 'achievement' and an image of ethnically diverse children in a classical orchestra rehearsal. There is no overt reference to improvisation.
Banner 4 'Welcome to ABRSM. We support high-quality music-making and learning around the world'	An interior photo of a violin section rehearsal. Two ethnically diverse girls are in focus. One wearing a name badge leans closely to observe the other playing the violin.	'About Page'	The 4th banner associates ABRSM with ethnically diverse children rehearsing in a classical orchestra string section with world-wide high-quality performance and learning. Improvisation is absent.
Banner 5 About Page 'We want everyone to be able to develop their skills and fulfil their potential with music'	An interior photo of a girl in her late teens receiving a violin lesson from an older male teacher. Both are Caucasian.	None	The About Page banner associates ABRSM's ethos of developing skills and fulfilling potential with formal violin teaching and learning.
Banner 6 Our Exams Page 'Motivating students of all ages and levels'	An interior photo of a young Caucasian girl with a cello looking up at her out-of-focus cello teacher.	None	The About Page banner associates ABRSM with a young (probably English) girl in a cello lesson. It is likely she is in the same orchestra rehearsal as the students in banner.

All information retrieved from: http://abrsm.org/en/home 10 September 2016

TCL: Textual	Visual (logos & photos)	Hyper-link to:	Combined meaning
Banner 2 of 7 Music Qualifications Grade, Certificate and Diploma exams for a range of musical styles	In the foreground are two Latin-American children playing the same chord on classical guitars. In the background, a Caucasian examiner sits and smiles at a desk.	'About Page'	This banner shows a classical guitar duo. Their ethnicity and clothing suggest that the photo was taken in a Latin American country. **The combination of text and image indicates that there is a range of exams and that English examiners travel worldwide to administer them.**
Banner 5 of 7 Rock & Pop Develop your skills and achieve your goals	Brightly coloured ethnically diverse pop band of teens performing on a smoke-filled stage.	'Rock & Pop'	This banner shows a group of ethnically diverse teens enjoying performing during an Ensemble Exam. **This specific performance exam includes an improvisation element.**

All information retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.com 10 September 2016

Appendix C. Data Sample: Home Page & About Page Content

Home Page functions	ABRSM.org examples	TrinityCollege.com examples	Relation to Findings	Research Question
…acts as a 'digital handshake' (Anctil, 2008)	'Welcome to ABRSM'	No overt textual welcome. However, institution name, logo and ethos stated in top left corner.	The assessment of improvisation is secure due to the reputation of the examination board.	RQ3 (perceptions)
…creates a competitive advantage with distinctive images and brands by standing out and leaving a lasting impression. (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Saichaie, 2011)	ABRSM brand suggests UK Royal affiliation as well as connection to the Royal Schools of Music.	The logo suggests affiliation with TCL and the Trinity Laban Conservatoire. Music and Dance photos suggest vibrant performance.	Contemporary vs historical practices of improvisation in music making Improvisation is a product advertised and nested within genre-related boundaries.'	RQ 1 & RQ 3 (practices & perceptions) RQ 1 & RQ 3 (practices & perceptions)
…provides evidence of the best products through images, logos and slogans. (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015)	'We are the exam board of the Royal Schools of Music'	'The international exam board for the performing arts and English language.'	The assessment of improvisation is secure due to the reputation of the examination board Improvisation is related to a product	RQ 2 (How is improvisation assessed?) RQ3 (perceptions)
…displays key topics in the style of short newspaper headlines (Richardson, 2007)	'Latest news'; 'Our Exams'; 'Featured publications'	'Music Qualifications'; 'Rock & Pop'	Improvisation is a product advertised and nested within genre-related boundaries.'	RQ1 (definitions) & RQ 3 (perceptions)
…communicates an institution's most significant information to a global audience (Kwong, 2000).	Menu items such as: 'About', 'Our Exams', 'Exam Booking'. Images communicate diversity of instruments and ethnicities.	Menu items such as: 'News', 'Music', 'Rock & Pop' Images communicate diversity of instruments and ethnicities	Contemporary vs historical practices of improvisation in music making Improvisation in domestic vs. international territories	RQ 1 (practices) RQ 3 (perceptions)

Multiple functions of a 'Home Page' as the primary information point for exam candidates.

The literature revealing functions of a Home Page was presented in section 3.3.1.1.

Home Page Summary

It was necessary to include a thorough analysis of the Home Page in order to establish how the ABRSM and TCL display and use language to represent themselves in their central information point for their global presence. The sampled Home pages of both the ABRSM and TCL contain promotional discourse associated with higher-education marketing (i.e. Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Askehave, 2007; Ramasubramanian *et al*., 2002) that exhibits the distinct accomplishments and recognitions of institutional actors such as students, faculty and buildings. The profiles of the examination boards are thus enhanced by the presence of institutional actors as part of the collection of tools used by the ABRSM and TCL to build and shape their institutional identities. This is congruent with research findings exploring Home Pages of higher-education institutions (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Saichaie, 2011; Toma *et al.*, 2005; Slaughter & Rhoads, 2004).

The Home Pages of both the ABRSM and TCL differ from the marketing literature cited in the last paragraph because they do not emphasise textual and visual pairings of faculty members guiding students (i.e. Hartley & Morphew, 2008). Instead, the examination boards communicate their abilities to support/guide by providing exemplary products such as a wide range of textually-presented examination options accompanied with images of smiling ethnically-diverse children and teens supporting each other's music-making practices. The ABRSM and TCL are distinctive from the fore-mentioned higher-education literature because they market exams and do not offer or market supportive teaching-and-learning staff members.

The textual language on the Home Pages are similar to newspaper headlines (i.e. Richardson, 2007). Headlines are often paired with visual language to create 'banners' (Kwong, 2000) or 'buttons' (Saichaie, 2011). The combination of textual with visual language within the banners often suggests the intellectual activities of the actors in the images. Within Fairclough's (2013; 1995a) critical discourse analysis framework, the type of textual/visual relational discourse demonstrated in the banners operates as a promotional technique enabling viewers to imagine themselves in the situation.

The only banner in the sample that alludes to improvisation is TCL's 'Rock & Pop' banner. This reinforces the perception that Trinity College's assessments of improvisation are linked to offering a range of separate musical styles (products) that develop customer's skills (i.e. the improvisation options in the exam *Technical Skills* section) and help them achieve their goals (i.e. improvisation as assessed as part of the *Performance* section of the exam). Complementing this, their Rock & Pop banner features a group of teens playing in a popular music ensemble on a stage enhanced by a smoke machine. The 'intellectual activity' (i.e. Fairclough, 2013; 1995a) of the actors in the banner helps convey TCL's perceptions of improvisation assessment as related to marketing Rock and Pop Group performance. Thus, viewers interested in the improvisation-related 'Group' assessment may read the banner's text "…achieve your goals" and imagine themselves performing on a smoke-filled stage.

At the time of my data collection in September 2016, neither examination board overtly communicated improvisation on their Home Page. [109] Neither Home Page alluded to or provided a direct link to the jazz-genre syllabuses or classical-genre improvisation options. Both examination boards have subsequently included updates to improvisation assessment regulations in their News/Blog sections[110]. However, these updates disappeared from the Home Page within a month when they were replaced by fresher news. This indicates that that ABRSM and TCL perceive updates to improvisation assessment to be relevant enough to include as temporary headlines in the secondary content of their Home Page, but improvisation and its assessment are not perceived to be an important enough of a product to merit an overt permanent representation on the Home Pages (further explored in 4.3.1).

[109] TCL does provide a hyperlinked menu heading labelled 'Rock & Pop' as well as a banner that may be interpreted as a Rock & Pop 'Groups Exam' that hyperlink to the improvisation-rich *Rock & Pop* examinations. However, for reasons given in section 3.3.1.4 relating to the size and symmetry of my case study, the Rock & Pop genre is beyond the scope of this thesis.
[110] ABRSM in January 2017 and TCL in December 2016.

The 'About' Page

This section begins with a brief discussion on the functions of an About Page as drawn from related literature on educational institution websites. Following this, I will explain how the discourses on the ABRSM's and TCL's About Pages can be used to answer aspects of my main research questions.

Whereas the Home Page of the ABRSM and TCL communicate the first impressions to the viewers, the About Page allows viewers to further explore the institution's history, traditions and options (i.e. Hossler *et al.*, 1999). About Pages have multiple functions. They can be viewed as an extension of the Home Page (Saichaie, 2011) in that they expand upon the succinct headlines, such as 'Latest News'[111] and accolades such as 'world's leading provider'[112], presented on the Home Page through self-promotional language. For example, "UK's largest music education body, one of its largest music publishers and the world's leading provider of music exams..."[113] About Pages can also convey *recognition* (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Anctil, 2008;) *relevance* (Fairclough, 2013; Saichaie, 2011) and demonstrate *how the institution serves the customer and community* (Anctil, 2008; Saichaie, 2011). All of these are displayed with corresponding examples from the About Pages of the ABRSM and TCL in Table 12.

Setting the expectations of the viewers, the discourse of the About Pages emphasises the institutions' ability to provide the required skills for students seeking success (e.g. 'We offer pathways and resources for learners and teachers that help build musical skills, provide goals and encourage progress'[114]). These discourses can be used to further interrogate the emergent themes of how the stakeholders perceive improvisation (RQ3). Doing so helps answer aspects of the main research questions of this thesis since the About Pages of the ABRSM and TCL help frame the contexts in which the ABRSM and TCL *define and practice improvisation* (Research Question 1), how they assess improvisation (RQ 2) and how they *perceive improvisation assessment* (RQ 3).

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[111] Retrieved from http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 10 September 2016
[112] Retrieved from http://www.trinitycollege.com/site/?id=616 September 2017
[113] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 10 September 2016
[114] Retrieved from http://www.trinitycollege.com/site/?id=616 September 2017

Table 12 'About Page': functions and themes

About Page: functions, text examples, key themes & related RQs.				
About Page functions:	ABRSM: About Page examples[115]	TCL: About Page examples[116]	Related theme	Related Research Question(s)
…expands upon the Home Page headlines (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Anctil, 2008; Saichaie, 2011)	'Latest News' (Home Page) is expanded to be a banner stating, 'The latest news, views and comment from ABRSM, our staff, volunteers and figures from across the wider music education industry.'	'… exams for a range of musical styles' (Home Page) expands to: 'Whatever your musical tastes, Trinity College London has the music qualifications for you… popular, jazz contemporary and classical music…''	1. The assessment of improvisation is secure due to the reputation of the exam board. 2. Improvisation defined by genre.	RQ1 RQ3
…communicates institutional traditions (e.g. size, awards, affiliations & famed members) (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015)	ABRSM is the UK's largest music education body, one of its largest music publishers… offering exams to more than 630,000 candidates in 93 countries every year.	'All Trinity College London examiners are professional musicians…' 'Each year Trinity College London supports the music education of thousands of students with assessments…'	1. The assessment of improvisation is secure due to the reputation of the exam board. 2. Domestic vs international market. 3. Improvisation as a part of teaching and learning.	RQ2 RQ3 (perceptions in T &L)
…convevs recognition (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Anctil, 2008; Saichaie, 2011)	'In partnership with the Royal Schools of Music, we support high-quality music-making and learning around the world'	'Trinity music exams are officially recognized by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) and by education authorities worldwide'.	1. The assessment of improvisation is secure due to the reputation of the exam board. 2. Domestic vs international market.	RQ2
…communicates relevance (e.g. local or international) (Saichaie, 2011; Fairclough, 2013)	'For many years we have provided scholarships and bursaries to enable outstanding UK and international students to study at the Royal Schools of Music.'	'The candidate is the heart of our focus. That's why we offer insightful assessments for everyone, from beginners right up to diplomas for the most advanced candidates.'	1. The assessment of improvisation is secure due to the reputation of the exam board. 2. Domestic vs international market. 3. Improvisation is related to a product.	RQ2 RQ3 (perception of improve as linked to a product)
… demonstrates how the institution serves the customer & community (Anctil, 2008; Saichaie, 2011)	'… we support music education by way of sponsorship of musical institutions and initiatives around the world.	'Trinity College London grade examinations allow students to play to their strengths…the structure is flexible and designed to reflect a real musical understanding.'	1. Improvisation as integral to performance or separate? 2. Improvisation as a part of teaching and learning.	RQ3 (perceptions linked to 'musical understanding'

The functions of an about page are present in the left column. Moving right are examples of textual descriptions taken from the About Pages of the ABRSM and TCL, the related key themes that emerged in the Home Page, and the research question to which they relate. All will be unpacked in this section.

[115] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 16 September 2017
[116] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.com/site/?id=6 16 September 2017

The ABRSM's About Page distinguishes itself from the Home Page by presenting new mediator content in the form of a menu and corresponding banners that hyperlink to ancillary sub-pages (e.g. 'our examiners'; 'the history of ABRSM'). There is a lack of overt visual or textual references to the products and practice related to 'improvisation' such as jazz syllabuses or photos of performers improvising.

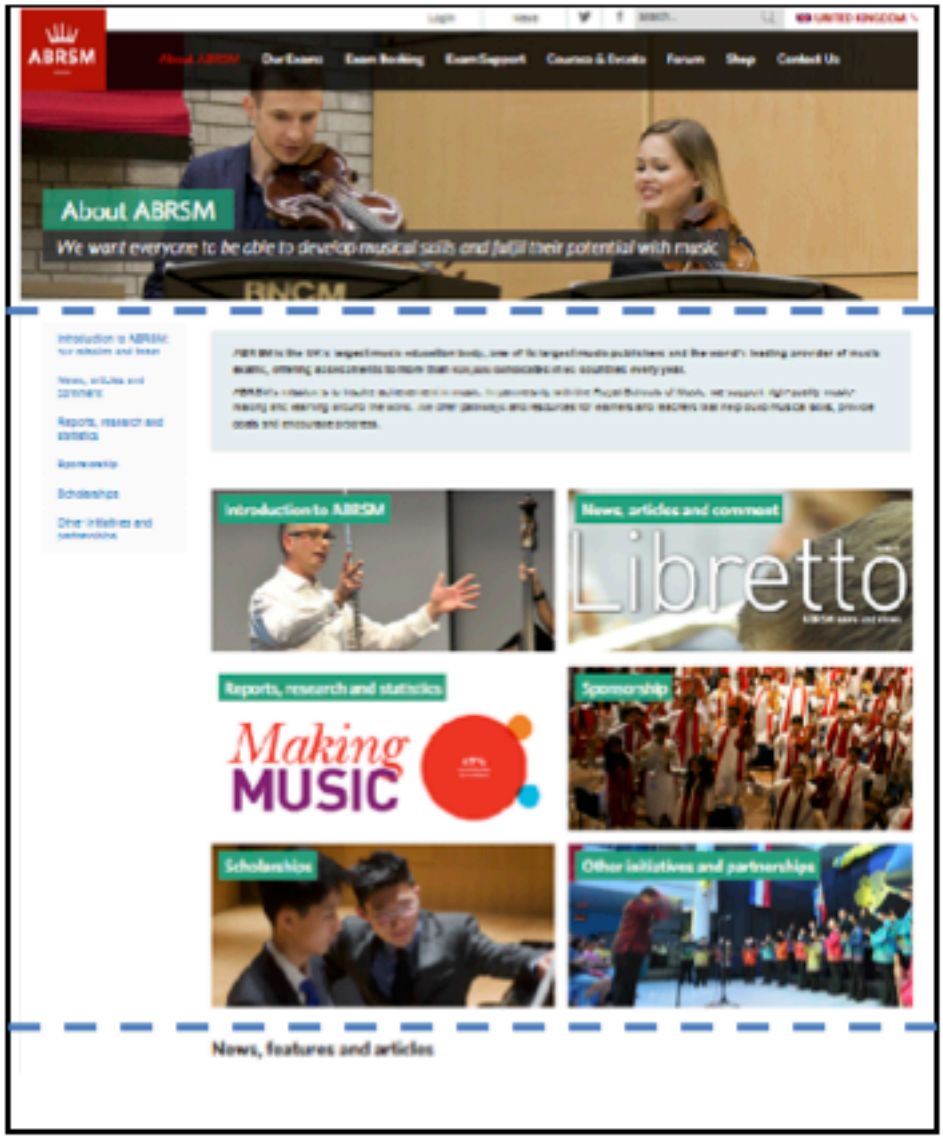

Figure 11 ABRSM 'About' webpage.[117]

Broken blue lines indicate the divisions of content into ideal, mediator & new sections (i.e. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

[117] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 16 September 2017

The About Pages and their ancillary sub-pages are relevant to this research because they bring more light to the key themes drawn from the Home Page and enable deeper insight into how the ABRSM perceives improvisation in regard to domestic and international markets, their relationships with prestigious institutions, their reach into teaching-and-learning environments, and how their history and size ensure the validity of improvisation assessment. The following descriptive analysis organizes text, related themes and relevance (i.e. Fairclough, 2013) to the research questions under headings based on the functions of an About Page (see Table 12).

Communicating exam board institutional traditions institutional traditions

The ABRSM touts size and what they offer in bold text at the top of the web page body: 'ABRSM is the UK's largest music education body, one of its largest music publishers and the world's leading provider of music exams, offering assessments to more than 630,000 candidates in 93 countries every year.'[118] The use of the definite article emphasises the ABRSM's authority in both domestic ('the UK's largest') and international (the world's leading') markets.

This text links to three of the key themes established in the end of the previous 'Home Page' section: 1) Improvisation as a part of teaching and learning; 2) Domestic vs international market of improvisation; 3) assessment of improvisation is secure due to the reputation of the board. The statement begins by positioning the ABRSM as 'the UK's largest music education body' and thereby establishes themselves within the field of education; a role that the ABRSM later supports and contradicts. This argument relates to my second research question because it infers that improvisation as perceived by the Examination board may differ from the perceptions of improvisation held by the teaching-and-learning stakeholders.

A second theme touched on by the sample text is the distinction between domestic and international examination markets ('UK's largest' vs 'world's leading'). This is relevant to answering Research Questions 2 and 3 because it indicates that improvisation may be assessed (i.e. RQ2) in regard to international or domestic

[118] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 10 September 2016

contexts, and also that perceptions of improvisation (i.e. RQ3) and its assessment may differ due to market location.

The third theme, that the assessment of improvisation is secure due to the size and reputation of the examination board ('ABRSM's authority'), relates to Research Question 2. It suggests that the ABRSM links the validity of their assessments to their size and reputation. The combination of these three themes strongly indicates that the validity and consistency of the definitions and practices of 'improvisation' (RQ1), as well as how improvisation is assessed (RQ2) and perceived (RQ3) are nested within the ABRSM's institutional traditions, such as their size, history and regional/international markets.

Recognising the products of tradition

The ABRSM supports the headlines of the Homepage by bringing forth official recognitions of the examinations, which are the products of their traditions. For example, statements such as 'In partnership with the Royal Schools of Music, we support high-quality music-making and learning around the world' provide further recognition of the ABRSM's traditions by reinforcing ongoing links between the ABRSM's products in conjunction with UK and globally-based partnerships. This statement supports the theme that the assessment of improvisation (RQ2) is secure due to the reputation of the exam board by developing links to other prestigious institutions whose examinations and levels were developed over time through traditions.

The statement also reinforces the theme that there is a distinction between *domestic* and *international* markets as regarding 'music-making' and music 'learning'. The ABRSM again places themselves in the field of teaching and learning by stating that they support 'high-quality' music learning. It is ambiguous as to whether 'high-quality' modifies 'music' and/or 'learning' (i.e. the learning of 'high-quality' music is not the same as the 'high-quality' learning of music). The same question can be applied to practice (RQ1) by asking whether 'high-quality' refers to 'music' or the 'making' of music.

Recognition of traditions helps communicate relevance.

The discourse of the ABRSM's About Page conveys a sense of building for the future that directly relates to Research Question three, which queries how the stakeholders perceive the assessment of improvisation. The ABRSM offers 'pathways and resources for learners and teachers that help build musical skills, provide goals and encourage progress.'[119] The congruent statement on the same page, that the ABRSM supports 'high-quality music-making and learning around the world' [120], draws attention to how the assessments are relevant because they benefit a global community. It is inferred that the ABRSM perceives improvisation to be a part of music that helps 'build musical skills' and 'encourage progress' that benefits 'a global community.'

The ABRSM thus associates their perceived relevance (RQ3) to how they serve the customer & community (international & domestic) in part by linking their past traditions to a look-towards-the-future. This is specifically targeted at the teaching and learning stakeholders by preparing thousands of music students worldwide to achieve their goals and reach their potential.

The textual discourse of the entire About Page is overwhelmingly institution-centred. The examination board communicates that they have the greatest responsibility to be the provider of materials that 'provide goals', 'encourage progress' and 'lead to musical developments.'[121] The onus is thus upon the examination board to provide services, not on the students and how they must perform during an assessment. This is import to stakeholders preparing for an assessment with improvisation because while students may be given the perception (i.e. RQ 3) that the examinations are there to help them achieve goals, it is not necessarily their own goals (or their teachers) that they are being helped to achieve.

The following table presents the three main research questions adjacent to summaries of the salient outcomes and supporting evidence from the visual and textual analyses of the Home and About webpages:

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[119] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 10 September 2016
[120] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 10 September 2016
[121] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 10 September 2016

Research Questions	Outcomes	Document-based Evidence
1. *How is improvisation defined & practiced in graded instrumental music examinations? (See 2.3)*	Definitions and practices of improvisation are nested within ABRSM's institutional traditions, such as their size, history and regional markets.	'In partnership with the Royal Schools of Music, we support high-quality music-making and learning around the world' ...recognition of the products of tradition
	ABRSM makes a distinction between music-making and music-learning	
2. *How is improvisation being assessed in graded instrumental music examinations? (See 2.3)*	The assessment of improvisation is secured through the reputation, history and size of ABRSM.	'...the world's leading provider of music exams, offering assessments to more than 630,000 candidates in 93 countries every year.' [122] ...communicates institutional traditions
	ABRSM links their assessments to ongoing partnerships with prestigious institutions such as the Royal Schools of Music, whose examinations and levels were developed over time through traditions.	'In partnership with the Royal Schools of Music, we support high-quality music-making and learning around the world' ...recognition of the products of tradition
	improvisation may be assessed in regard to international or domestic contexts (differences in market location)	
	A distinction between a 'music' exam and an 'instrumental' exam. ABRSM examiner examine 'music.'	*'Our exams are music exams first rather than instrumental or singing exams'* About sub-pages
	the assessment of improvisation (RQ2) is not necessarily conducted by examiners with an expertise in improvisation because all examiners use the 'marking criteria' for assessment.	*ABRSM examiners assess all instruments and singing as generalist musicians rather than as instrumental or vocal specialists. They use our marking criteria to assess the musical outcome.* About sub-pages
	experts ('specialists') on improvisation and genre (i.e. ABRSM Jazz) are employed by ABRSM to select the syllabus repertoire. The 'specialists' are consulted, but the specialists are not necessarily examiners.	*we do use specialists to choose the pieces and songs for our syllabuses...* About sub-pages
	that examiners assess 'outcome', not the process or preparation that went into the performance. This is claimed to help maintain consistent marking (validity).	*'They use our marking criteria to assess the musical outcome, not the technique used to achieve it, and this allows consistent marking across all instruments.* About sub-pages
What are the stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation in graded instrumental music examinations? (See 2.3)	Improvisation is not overtly communicated through text or visuals on the about page.	ABRSM's About Page Content
	Examination board's perception of improvisation assessment may differ in relation to market location (international/domestic contexts)	'UK's largest' vs 'world's leading'
	ABRSM perceives improvisation to be a part of music that helps 'build musical skills' and 'encourage progress' that benefits 'a global community.'	ABRSM offers 'pathways and resources for learners and teachers that help build musical skills, provide goals and encourage progress.'[123] ABRSM supports 'high-quality music-making and learning around the world' [124] ...recognition of traditions helps communicate *relevance*.

[122] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 10 September 2016
[123] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 10 September 2016
[124] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/ 10 September 2016

Appendix D. Marketing Narratives & Promotional Discourse

Following on from the theory and data sample presented in Appendix C (Home & About webpages), this section presents the analysis and salient themes of that data sample. I argue that the examination boards use improvisation as part of their effort to market their openness to creativity while positioning themselves as wold-leading music authorities through the use of corporate language.

Recalling the review of literature using Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional analytical framework to explore how educational institutions use language to represent themselves (see 3.3.1.2), it was found that universities and colleges in the UK (Sanagar, 2013), Australia (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015), North America (Saichaie, 2011) and Romania (Chipper, 2006) shape their professional image to build prestige and attract potential customers. These were associated with competitions between similar organisations that produced similar products for a similar pool of customers. Since higher education is largely an 'intangible product' (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015, p. 3), colleges seeking to gain an advantage over those with similar products needed evidence to support their claims via logos, images, and slogans. Thus, institutional websites and syllabuses have been shown to not just to communicate information, but to be strategic tools for introducing a corporation's products to the public. Key to this is that the superiority of the products is associated with the corporate brand and reputation.

The following section argues that the ABRSM and TCL function very much like the education institutions explored in section 3.3.1.2. 'Improvisation' is thus treated like the 'intangible product' (*ibid*) and that the security of improvisation assessment is largely assured through the reputation of the examination board. This is problematic because both the ABRSM and TCL have only recently included improvisation in their exams and yet they draw upon their corporate histories, traditions and networks to provide assurances that they are the authorities of improvisation assessments while simultaneously making the exact marking criteria used for assessing improvisation difficult to find.

Promotional discourse of the boards

The language of the ABRSM and TCL follows the trends set by international educational institutions, such as colleges and universities (see 3.3.1.1), in that they utilise 'corporate language' (see 3.3.1.1) to establish and maintain their distinctive branding and identities. The literature review in 3.3.1.2 linked similar practices of education institutions using corporate language to the corporate goals of building prestige as well as increasing related social and economic strength (i.e. Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Saichaie, 2011; Fairclough 2013).

One of the key findings of 'promotional culture' (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015) has been the pivot of relative salience of what Fairclough (2010) terms 'divergent semiotic modalities'. An important example is that there is the ongoing trend towards greater dependence on visual elements for expressing meaning and the simultaneous diminishing of verbal elements (Fairclough, 2010). The websites of the ABRSM and TCL present the viewer with a great deal of visual aids such as logos, images and banners in order to shape their corporate identities and leave specific impressions upon the viewers utilise a great deal of visual aids (e.g. logo, images, videos) as tangible evidence to shape their identities and leave memorable impression on the viewers (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015).

Both the ABRSM and TCL use the language on their About Pages to enhance their prestige by highlighting the recognition of their past traditions and linking them to future success by using their products. The various discourse integrates to present a narrative that there is a continuous historical thread of distinctive, relevant and tested components of the exam boards. Dialogue concerning the past includes the founding, size, links to associations with prestigious and/or government-endorsed education institutions as well as regional relevance (local through international). This discourse also suggests the future goal-achieving prospects for both the institutions and those that become involved with their products and partnerships.

The self-promotional discourse of the institutions has been reported in previous research exploring colleges and universities[125] but has not until now been explored

[125] Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Saichaie, 2011; Anctil, 2008; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Askehave,

in graded music examinations. While the self-promotion of the ABRSM and TCL is in line with previous research, a key difference exists in that the About pages of the ABRSM and TCL promote and stress the relevance of the individual commercial products that they offer. The exam boards are promoting, selling and attesting to the merits of their exams and books as tools built through tradition that enable customers (termed 'students' or 'candidates') locally and globally to achieve their goals. The previously studied colleges and universities in the literature did not do this.

Reflecting on a point made by Hartley & Morphew (2008), that spotlighting the individual benefits associated with the outcome of higher education does not necessarily align with the goals of higher education, it is apparent that when the ABRSM writes that they 'provide goals'[126] they distance themselves from the goals of the other stakeholders of this research (e.g. parents, teachers & students). This indicates a gap between themselves and perceptions of improvisation and its assessment which are integral to my main research questions.

The ABRSM and TCL communicate their most salient information at the tops of their Home page via logos, menus and banners. The ABRSM increases their domestic exclusivity by stating prominently on their Home Page and banners that they are "*the* exam board of the Royal Schools of Music" (see Appendix C). By accompanying this statement with 'We support high-quality music-making and learning around the world' (*ibid*), the ABRSM emphasizes that they are a global institution with a global customer base. The placement of 'high-quality' associates their brand with both high-quality music and high-quality learning. Their improvisation options should thus be perceived as high-quality on a global scale.

TCL greets the viewer with their logo, menu and time-controlled billboard banners. Whereas all of the ABRSM's banners reaffirm their carefully-cultivated institutional brand, TCL's two music-related banners do not contain the TCL name or logo and simply state what they offer; examinations in 'Music' and 'Rock & Pop'. Relating the

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2007; Fairclough, 1995a; 1993

[126] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/introduction-to-abrsm-our-mission-and-team/ 10 September 2016

differences between these two banners to how TCL perceives assessed improvisation (RQ3):

- Improvisation assessments are perceived as being salient enough to allude to in one of the two music-related banners;

- TCL perceives the syllabus genre of 'Rock & Pop' as being separate from the assessed improvisation associated with the syllabus genres found under the heading 'Music' (Classical and Jazz).

How the boards use 'improvisation' to increase their competitive edge.
In this section, I will present evidence from my critical discourse analysis of the websites and syllabuses of the ABRSM and TCL (Appendix C) to support an argument that the examination boards use corporate language and eye-catching images to increase their authority. While greater authority has been shown in previous research to increase one corporation's competitive edge over another (3.3.1.1), the following section explores how greater authority is used to build greater belief in the examinations and the improvisation assessments contained within.

Both the ABRSM and TCL use the language on their About Pages to enhance their prestige by highlighting the recognition of their past traditions and linking them to future success by using their products. The various discourse integrates to present a narrative that there is a continuous historical thread of distinctive, relevant and tested components of the exam boards. Dialogue concerning the past includes the founding, size, links to associations with prestigious and/or government-endorsed education institutions as well as regional relevance (local through international). This discourse also suggests the future goal-achieving prospects for both the institutions and those that become involved with their products and partnerships.

The self-promotional discourse of the institutions has been reported in previous research exploring colleges and universities[127] but has not until now been explored in graded music examinations. While the self-promotion of the ABRSM and TCL is in line with previous research, a key difference exists in that the About pages of the ABRSM and TCL promote and stress the relevance of the individual commercial products that they offer. The exam boards are promoting, selling and attesting to the merits of their exams and books as tools built through tradition that enable customers (termed 'students' or 'candidates') locally and globally to achieve their goals. The previously studied colleges and universities in the literature did not do this.

Reflecting on a point made by Hartley & Morphew (2008), that spotlighting the individual benefits associated with the outcome of higher education does not necessarily align with the goals of higher education, it is apparent that when the ABRSM writes that they 'provide goals'[128] they are output-driven and distance themselves from the goals of the other stakeholders of this research (e.g. parents, teachers & students). This indicates a gap between themselves and perceptions of improvisation and its assessment which are integral to my main research questions.

Presenting themselves as national/international

ABRSM utilizes language to increase exclusivity and edge over domestic competition by implying that no other exam board is associated with the domestic UK Royal-branded music institutions. For example, Banner 2 (Appendix B) utilizes the definite article to stress domestic links to English Royal patronage and UK-based Royal Schools of Music by stating 'we are the exam board of the Royal Schools of Music'. All the actors depicted in the sampled banners are engaged in classical orchestra rehearsals, an area in which the ABRSM does not offer improvisation assessments. Thus, the ABRSM communicates a strong narrative of classical music practice and education in their domestic institution links without a reference to improvisation.

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[127] For example: Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Saichaie, 2011; Anctil, 2008; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Askehave, 2007; Fairclough, 1995a; 1993.
[128] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/introduction-to-abrsm-our-mission-and-team/ 10 September 2016

While maintaining domestic roots, the ABRSM does use their banners to highlight international aspirations by regularly depicting ethnically diverse actors (see 2, 3 & 4 in Appendix B, last page) and stating they 'support high-quality music-making and learning around the world' (*ibid*). Unfortunately, the ABRSM does not elaborate on what they mean by 'high-quality' in regard to world-wide practice and learning. While the ABRSM successfully communicates that their perceptions of 'high-quality music-making' are strongly rooted in UK domestic contexts, inclusive of multiple ethnicities and are supported around the world, they neglect to include any textual or visual reference to improvisation assessments.

The ABRSM does not communicate their perceptions of improvisation to the viewers of their Home, About or Exams page and in failing to do so, they communicate to teachers, students and parents that improvisation is not salient enough to be included in their primary institutional narratives of 'high-quality music-making and learning' (Banner 4 in Appendix B).

Summary

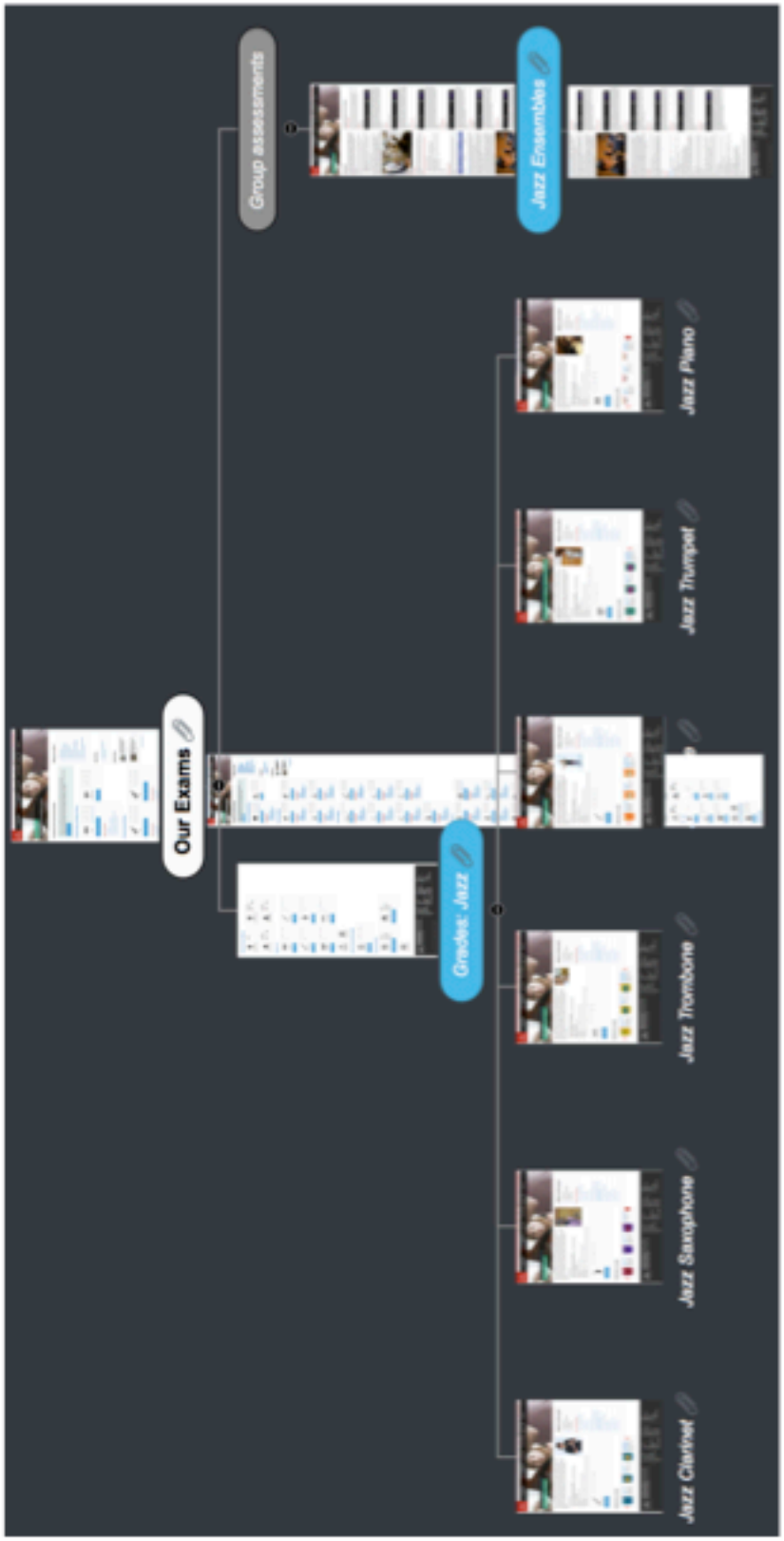
With the reoccurring theme of *domestic vs international*, the ABRSM places more stress on their domestic heritage than their international one giving the impression that ABRSM's perceptions are rooted in domestic contexts, particularly those related to orchestra performance (i.e. their banner images). The ABRSM uses their logo to communicate their UK Royal patronage and their associations with the Royal Schools of Music.

Conversely, TCL uses their logo to link themselves to a domestic institution, (Trinity Laban Conservatoire) but distinguishes themselves by including text communicating their international rather than domestic status. It emerges that TCL stakes out international territory by stating in their logo that they are 'the international exam board' (Appendix C) and supporting it with a banner image of an examination occurring in a Latin-American environment (Appendix C). This is relevant to my research questions because it suggests that TCL's *perceptions* of improvisation (RQ 3) may be rooted in domestic/international contexts.

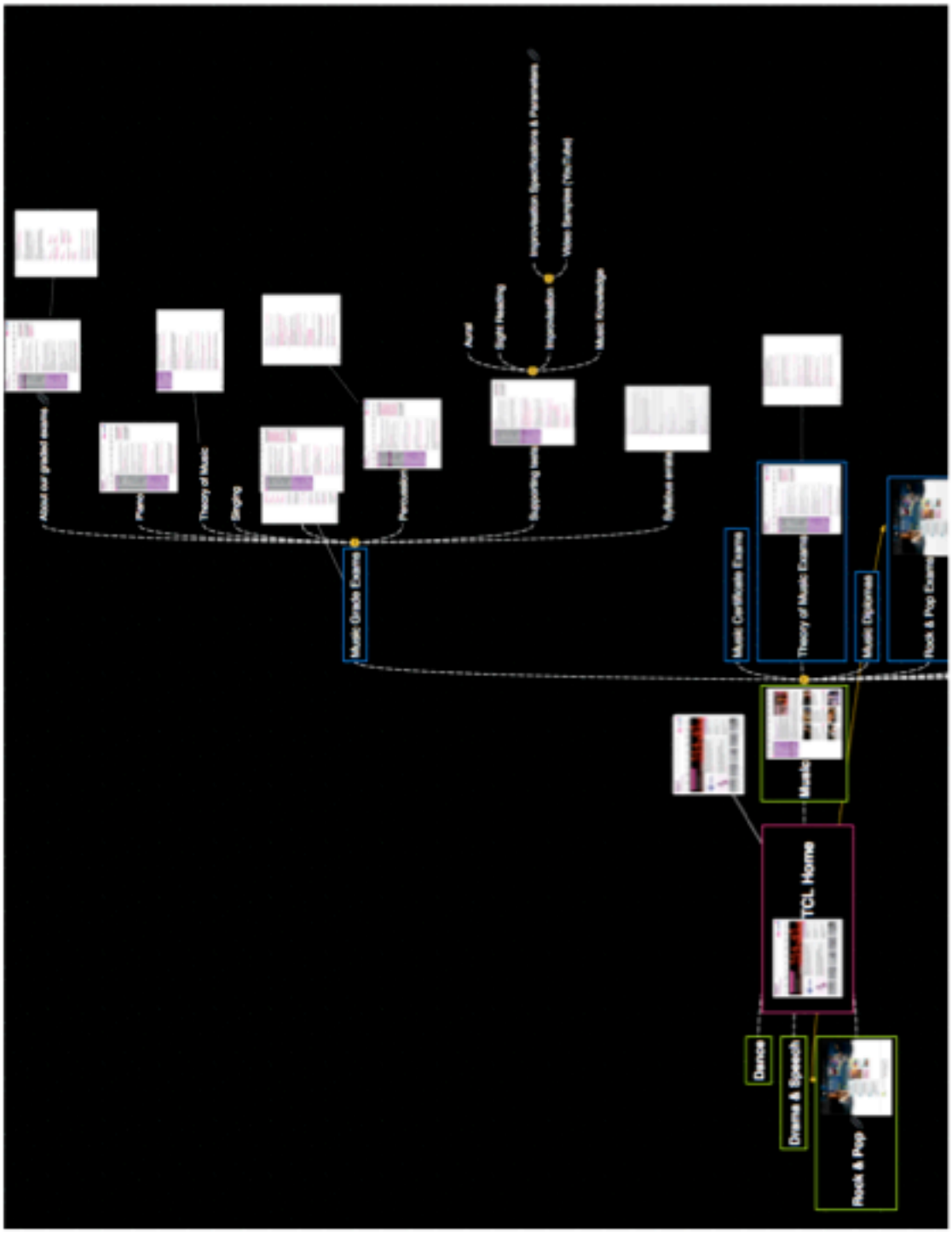
Appendix E. ABRSM & TCL Website Mind Maps

'Mindview' mind-mapping software was used to replicate and organise screenshots and HTML text versions of all sampled pages from the ABRSM and TCL institutional websites (see 3.3.1.4). The following images are mind mapped screenshots of my Sept-Dec 2016 data collection that expand to reveal hyperlinked pages titled 'Grades: Jazz' and 'Jazz Ensembles'. Additional hyperlinked pages like 'Jazz trombone' or the 'Exams' page with the long list of all available instruments branch off from there. Note that the 'paper clip' icons could be clicked with a cursor to access attached files such as downloadable pdfs (i.e. syllabuses) and HTML versions of each page (useful for text searches).

ABRSM institutional website mapping sample.

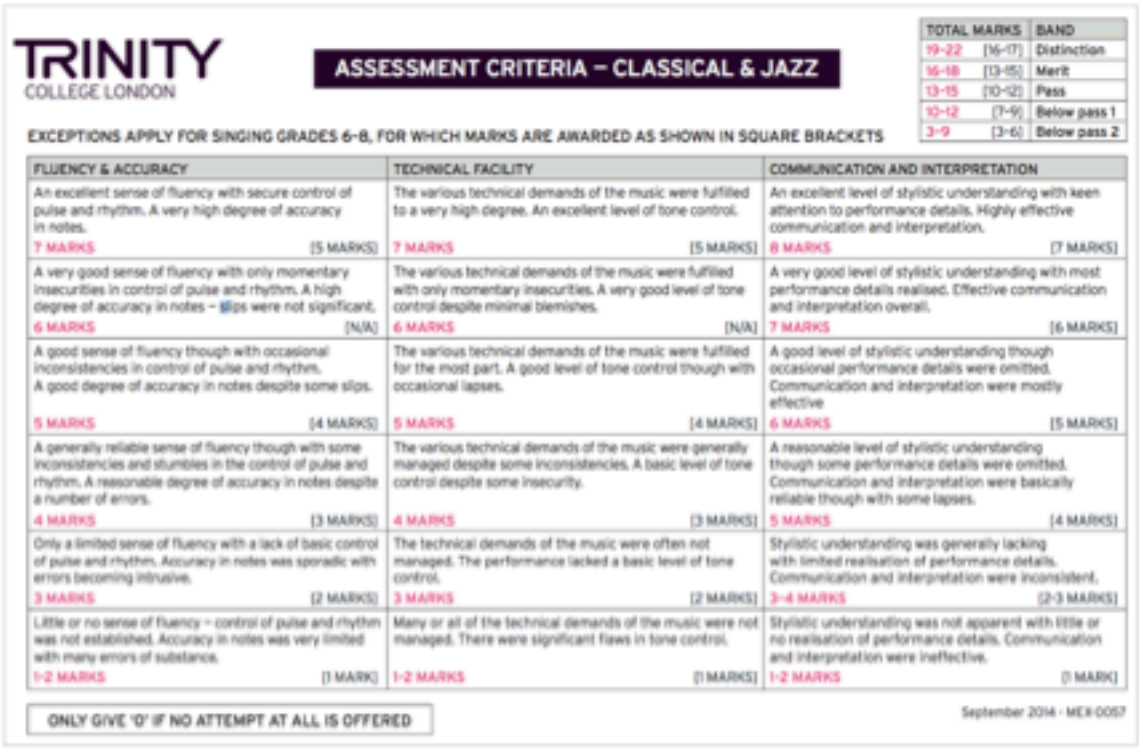


TCL institutional website mapping sample.



Appendix F. Marking Rubrics

TCL Performance rubric (classical & jazz):



TRINITY COLLEGE LONDON

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA – CLASSICAL & JAZZ

TOTAL MARKS		BAND
19–22	[16–17]	Distinction
16–18	[13–15]	Merit
13–15	[10–12]	Pass
10–12	[7–9]	Below pass 1
3–9	[3–6]	Below pass 2

EXCEPTIONS APPLY FOR SINGING GRADES 6–8, FOR WHICH MARKS ARE AWARDED AS SHOWN IN SQUARE BRACKETS

FLUENCY & ACCURACY	TECHNICAL FACILITY	COMMUNICATION AND INTERPRETATION
An excellent sense of fluency with secure control of pulse and rhythm. A very high degree of accuracy in notes. 7 MARKS [5 MARKS]	The various technical demands of the music were fulfilled to a very high degree. An excellent level of tone control. 7 MARKS [5 MARKS]	An excellent level of stylistic understanding with keen attention to performance details. Highly effective communication and interpretation. 8 MARKS [7 MARKS]
A very good sense of fluency with only momentary insecurities in control of pulse and rhythm. A high degree of accuracy in notes – slips were not significant. 6 MARKS [N/A]	The various technical demands of the music were fulfilled with only momentary insecurities. A very good level of tone control despite minimal blemishes. 6 MARKS [N/A]	A very good level of stylistic understanding with most performance details realised. Effective communication and interpretation overall. 7 MARKS [6 MARKS]
A good sense of fluency though with occasional inconsistencies in control of pulse and rhythm. A good degree of accuracy in notes despite some slips. 5 MARKS [4 MARKS]	The various technical demands of the music were fulfilled for the most part. A good level of tone control though with occasional lapses. 5 MARKS [4 MARKS]	A good level of stylistic understanding though occasional performance details were omitted. Communication and interpretation were mostly effective 6 MARKS [5 MARKS]
A generally reliable sense of fluency though with some inconsistencies and stumbles in the control of pulse and rhythm. A reasonable degree of accuracy in notes despite a number of errors. 4 MARKS [3 MARKS]	The various technical demands of the music were generally managed despite some inconsistencies. A basic level of tone control despite some insecurity. 4 MARKS [3 MARKS]	A reasonable level of stylistic understanding though some performance details were omitted. Communication and interpretation were basically reliable though with some lapses. 5 MARKS [4 MARKS]
Only a limited sense of fluency with a lack of basic control of pulse and rhythm. Accuracy in notes was sporadic with errors becoming intrusive. 3 MARKS [2 MARKS]	The technical demands of the music were often not managed. The performance lacked a basic level of tone control. 3 MARKS [2 MARKS]	Stylistic understanding was generally lacking with limited realisation of performance details. Communication and interpretation were inconsistent. 3–4 MARKS [2–3 MARKS]
Little or no sense of fluency – control of pulse and rhythm was not established. Accuracy in notes was very limited with many errors of substance. 1–2 MARKS [1 MARK]	Many or all of the technical demands of the music were not managed. There were significant flaws in tone control. 1–2 MARKS [1 MARKS]	Stylistic understanding was not apparent with little or no realisation of performance details. Communication and interpretation were ineffective. 1–2 MARKS [1 MARK]

ONLY GIVE '0' IF NO ATTEMPT AT ALL IS OFFERED

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TCL Supporting Test 2 rubric:

	IMPROVISATION MAX. 10 MARKS
DISTINCTION 9–10 OUT OF 10	An excellent or very good sense of musical structure, based on the stimulus, delivered with a high level of fluency. A highly creative and imaginative response.
MERIT 8 OUT OF 10	A good sense of musical structure, based on the stimulus, delivered with a good level of fluency. A creative and imaginative response overall.
PASS 6–7 OUT OF 10	A generally reliable sense of musical structure, based on the stimulus, delivered with a reasonable level of fluency despite occasional lapses. Some element of creativity and imagination in the response.
BELOW PASS 1 4–5 OUT OF 10	A limited or very limited sense of musical structure, with little relation to the stimulus, delivered with some hesitations and stumbles in fluency. A lack of creativity and imagination in the response.
BELOW PASS 2 1–3 OUT OF 10	Musical structure was only partially or not apparent with no relation to the stimulus and fluency often compromised. Little or no creativity or imagination in the response.

ABRSM Jazz Performance rubric:

TUNES	Pitch	Time	Tone	Shape	Performance
Distinction 27-30	• Highly accurate notes and intonation • Solo has stylish and inventive note choices • Improvisation shows harmonic awareness	• Fluent, with flexibility where appropriate • Rhythmic character and feel well conveyed throughout • Convincing groove in the improvisation	• Well projected • Confident use of jazz tonal qualities	• Expressive, idiomatic musical shaping in the Head • Solo has authentic detail	• Assured • Fully committed • Vivid communication of character and style • Idiomatic embellishment
Merit 24-26	• Largely accurate notes and intonation • Solo has controlled note choices • Coherent improvisation	• Sustained, effective tempo and groove • Good sense of rhythm and feel throughout • Controlled rhythmic placement in the improvisation	• Mainly controlled and consistent • Good jazz tonal awareness	• Clear musical shaping in the Head • Solo has some expressive variety	• Positive • Carrying musical conviction • Character and style communicated • Effective embellishment
Pass 20-23	• Generally correct notes and intonation • Solo has some contour	• Suitable tempo • Overall rhythmic accuracy and correct feel • Generally stable placement in the Solo	• Generally reliable • Adequate jazz tonal awareness	• Some realisation of musical shape and/or detail	• Generally secure, prompt recovery from any slips • Some musical involvement • Embellishment attempted
Below Pass 17-19	• Frequent note errors and/or unreliable intonation • Solo lacks contour	• Unsuitable and/or uncontrolled tempo • Irregular pulse and groove • Inaccurate rhythm and/or incorrect feel	• Uneven and/or unreliable • Inadequate jazz tonal awareness	• Insufficient musical shaping	• Insecure, inadequate recovery from any slips • Insufficient musical involvement • Ineffective or no embellishment
13-16	• Largely inaccurate notes and/or intonation • Solo lacks coherence	• Erratic tempo and/or rhythm • Groove and feel not established	• Serious lack of tonal control	• Musical shaping largely unrealised	• Lacking continuity • No musical involvement
10-12	• Highly inaccurate notes and/or intonation • Solo very incoherent or absent	• Incoherent tempo and/or pulse • Groove and feel absent	• No tonal control	• No shape	• Unable to continue for more than a short section
0	• No work offered	• No work offered	• No work offered	• No work offered	• No work offered

For clarity, grey boxes have been added around references to 'solo' and 'improvisation' above.

ABRSM Quick Study rubric:

Mark	Aural
Distinction 17–18	• Accurate throughout • Musically perceptive • Confident response
Merit 15–16	• Strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses • Musically aware • Secure response
Pass 12-14	• Strengths just outweigh weaknesses • Cautious response
Below Pass 9-11	• Weaknesses outweigh strengths • Uncertain response
6-8	• Inaccuracy throughout • Vague response
0	• No work offered

ABRSM Aural Test rubric:

Mark	Quick study
Distinction 19–21	• Highly accurate given material • Improvised answer in keeping with style • Well-balanced and confident presentation
Merit 17–18	• Broadly accurate given material • Controlled improvised answer • Largely secure presentation
Pass 14-16	• Outline of given material in place • Improvised answer has basic contour • Cautious presentation
Below Pass 11-13	• Given material not sufficiently realised • Improvised answer lacking coherence • Insecure presentation
7-10	• Very approximate given material • Improvised answer incoherent or absent • Very uncertain presentation
0	• No work offered

Appendix G. Observation Schedule

The observations followed the timeline established in section 3.3.2.1. Six observations (May-July 2016) of each triad were conducted at the regularly-scheduled weekly instrumental music lessons with the aim of having the 2016 Summer ABRSM and TCL examinations occur between the fifth and sixth observations. Preliminary interviews (3.3.2.2) with each participant took place in the weeks prior to commencing the first observations. Post examination interviews (3.3.2.2) occurred after the participants received the examination results.

Table 13 Observation timetable.

	Case 1 **TCL Jazz Saxophone Grade 7**	**Case 2** **TCL Classical Trumpet Grade 7**	**Case 3** **ABRSM Jazz Flute Grade 4**
Location	Student's Home	Student's Home	Teacher's private studio
Participants (observed once per week unless participants rescheduled lessons)	Sal (teacher), Chad (student), Christine (parent)	Troy (teacher), Tim (student), John (parent)	Flynn (teacher), Heather (student), Holly (parent)
Total hours of observations	6	6	6
Initial interviews	03 May (w/ teacher) 10 May (w/ mother & student)	04 May (w/ teacher) 14 May (w/ parents & student)	18 April (w/ teacher) 25 April (w/ mother & student)
1st Observation	25 May	16 May	24 May
2nd Observation	01 June	29 May	31 May
3rd Observation	08 June	05 June	07 June
4th Observation	20 June	16 June	14 June
5th Observation	01 July	21 June	21 June
6th Observation	22 July	05 July	12 July
Final interviews	06 Aug	06 Aug	07 Aug

Table 13 contains the calendar of observations and interviews. The top row indicates the specific syllabus that was being followed. Reading downward from the syllabus reveals the names of the participants and the dates in which all interviews and observations occurred. Since the exams occurred after the fifth observation at the end of June (TCL) or beginning of July (ABRSM), the sixth observation for all of the instruments occurred several weeks after the examination results were received. The table also shows that the final interviews occurred several weeks after the last observation, which gave me time to transcribe the improvisation-related content from my audio recordings of the observations and generate interview questions based on the entire timeline.

The observation settings:

Exemplar 1 (TCL Grade 7 Jazz Alto Saxophone): All occurred in the front room of the student's house. Sitting on a sofa near the entrance with a notebook and audio recorder, I was given a strong overall impression from the front room full of instruments, CDs and books that music making is an important aspect of home life. In front of me were shelves holding hundreds of CDs and a large stereo with speakers. On the floor were Chad's alto saxophone and a large black case containing a baritone saxophone on loan from Chad's aunt. The room was as well-fitted for music lessons as many of the professional instrumental teaching studios that I have visited.

Exemplar 2 (TCL Grade 7 Trumpet): The setting of the lessons/observations was a music room in Tim's House. Sitting on a chair with a notebook and audio recorder, I was surrounded by shelves containing music books, CDs, records and brass instrument paraphernalia (i.e. mutes, tools, oils). There was an electronic keyboard and a music stand that was overflowing with books of sheet music for brass; most of which were published by Trinity College and provided evidence of the strong ongoing presence of Trinity in Tim's music learning.

Exemplar 3 (ABRSM Grade 4 Jazz Flute): Flynn is in his early forties and teaches from a studio space within a small office building. He has done some soundproofing of the walls. The space contains one black upright piano and two music stands. On top of the piano are stacks of music books that include classical and jazz repertoire,

tune books, and flute method books (e.g. Trevor Wye and Marcel Moyse). Heather (17) has been coming to Flynn for nearly two years. She used to come every week, but recently has been coming only once every other week. Heather began playing flute in school when she was 9 and has carried on steadily since then. The majority of her experience was with classical music, but she came to Flynn because she wanted to work with a different repertoire. Stating that the classical pieces that were given to her by former teachers and the exam pieces that she prepared were not very interesting. Heather has come to learn improvisation with Flynn and is particularly keen on exploring new jazzy repertoire or folk music.

Appendix H. Methodological Literature for Observations & Interviews

Davidson & Scutt

The use of observation in this thesis to investigate music students, teachers and parents preparing for the improvisation tasks within graded music examinations builds primarily on a research study by Davidson and Scutt (1999) that used observations and interviews to explore *Instrumental learning with exams in mind*. The researchers focused on interactions between participant 'triads' comprised of an (a) instrumental music teacher, (b) a student and (c) at least one parent of the student. Through six months of observations and interviews of instrumental music lessons before and after the ABRSM classical examinations, Davidson and Scutt found that the perceptions and interactions between teacher-student-parent triads were strongly influenced by the 'external' contexts of the music examinations; particularly as the date of the examination drew nearer.

This sequence of observations and interviews used by Davidson and Scutt (1999) get to the heart of the aspects of my research questions not touched by document analysis: how students', teachers' and parents' perceptions of improvisation can differ and evolve throughout the process of preparing for an examination. In Davidson and Scutt's (1999) study, observations of each participating triad (four teachers, four to five students of each teacher, one parent of each student) occurred as they prepared for an ABRSM classical-genre graded examination.

Observations occurred once per month for six months; four months before the exam and approximately two months after the exam. The researchers' rationale was to monitor developments in pedagogical practices from the decision to register for an exam (thus capturing the rationale for doing so) and continue until two months after completing the exam (thus capturing how the exam influenced the perceptions and interrelations of the participants). Being impressed with how well this timeline worked, I used it as the basis of the observation and interview timeline of my research (see Appendix E).

Davidson and Scutt (1999) bookended their observations with 'qualitative semi-structured interviews' (p. 82) to better understand the perspectives of the participants and to increase the validity of their research by confirming their interpretations of the observations with the participants. Several weeks prior to the first observations, the researchers interviewed the participants to explore their perceptions regarding the examinations and other stakeholders. In addition to verifying the suitability of the participants to the research, the pre-observation interviews helped the researchers locate the key themes used to structure and code their observation data. Following their example, I included pre-observation interviews in my methodology to verify suitability and gain both ethnographic information and potential research themes (3.3.2.2).

After the six months of observations, Davidson & Scutt conducted additional interviews to determine how the participants' perspectives of the exams and the other members of their triad developed during the course of the research. Having been impressed with the candid dialogue they elicited through skilful final interviews from the participants, particularly the parents and teachers, I included similar post-observation interviews into my research timeline (see 3.3.2.1). These interviews require consideration of the participants' perceptions and experiences with improvisation and the examinations and therefore require extra care to ask relevant formal interview questions.

During the six months of observations, Davidson and Scutt (1999) spoke with the participants during the observations when uncertainties of meaning arose or when they determined that data arising in the observations necessitated further exploration. The research is not clear regarding the extent to which participants were further interviewed during the observations. This shortcoming will be shortly addressed during my reviews of Seddon (2005) and Nerland (2007) and lead to the provision of ongoing *member checks* (see 3.3.2.2) that enable me to verify my interpretations of the observation dialogues with the interpretations of the participants.

Data collection & presentation

During their observations, Davidson and Scutt (1999) made audio recordings and field notes that were later transcribed and coded. Relevant data were presented as short ethnographic descriptions with key illustrative quotations used to illustrate and support the authors' argument. Unfortunately, full details of transcriptions, coding and analysis were not provided (most likely due to restrictions of the article's length).

Also absent are the specific comments written by each ABRSM examiner and how those comments were then interpreted by the students, teachers and parents. This is understandable because the authors were not interested in the exact content of the exam, but instead focused on how the exam affected those preparing for it. My research must differ here because I believe that the examiner comments can provide valuable insight into how the examiners assess (RQ2) and perceive (RQ3) improvisation in the exams. The examiner comments can be used by the teachers as a tool for formative assessment in lessons following the examination. Therefore, observing if and how the examiners' feedback is interpreted through reflective dialogue is important because it can provide further insight the teaching-and-learning stakeholders' perceptions of improvisation (RQ3) and its assessment (RQ 2).

While Davidson and Scutt's (1999) investigation of 'instrumental learning with exams in mind' provides a clear template for investigating changes with teaching and learning triads in preparation for an ABRSM instrumental music examination, there are questions with their methodological framework that must be further addressed before adapting it to my research questions (see bullet points).

- Was the use of a six-month timeframe necessary or more beneficial than a shorter timeframe?
- What exactly was transcribed?
- How exactly was the data coded?
- How exactly were the observations conducted?
- Did the observer make field notes during the observations? If so, how were the field notes incorporated?
- How did Davidson & Scutt's backgrounds and interests affect how they interpreted the data over the duration of their research?

Note that each of the bullet points is accompanied with a signpost to where it will be further addressed with examples from the literature. All of these questions will be addressed in the subsequent sections.

Additional salient literature

The following section presents a review of salient observation and interview research to further develop my methodology and address the limitations of the Davidson & Scutt (1999) study outlined in the last section. The three key studies are presented in Table 14:

Table 14 Key observation literature.

	What was observed	What was found	Observation Methods	Frequency & Sampling	Analysis
Davidson & Scutt, 1999	Case study that Explored parent-teacher-student views of preparing for examinations	The focus on 'triads' of teachers, students and parents elicited their inter-dynamics & changes of roles, responsibilities and tensions over the course of ABRSM examinations.	How recordings were made & exactly how often was not defined	4 teachers, 18 ABRSM students (violin & piano) and at least one parent of each student. Informal interviews with the teachers took place six weeks before and four weeks after the exams.	Themes identified. Quotes presented in an ethnographic description. No samples of analysis provided.
Seddon, 2005	Case study of how musicians 'attune' to each other when improvising or planning improvisation.	Identifying verbal and non-verbal modes of thinking and how these were used by jazz improvisers to communicate.	Video-recorded rehearsals working towards a live performance.	Use of 'Member checks' to verify that the participant's interpretations were the same as those of the researcher.	5 stages of constant comparison method.
Miell & Littleton, 2008	Case study of collective understanding construction between musicians in a band rehearsal outside of school.	Co-construction & negotiation of meaning & identity. Clearer differences between directness & criticisms than found in school or formal music lessons.	The musicians video recorded their own interactions. No researcher was present.	5 teens recorded their regular band practice for several weeks. No regular schedule.	*Sociocultural discourse analysis* of material related to joint evaluations of performances.
Dobson, 2012	Case study of the processes of inter-disciplinary creative collaboration.	Group roles can influence the development of common knowledge in long-term interdisciplinary collaborating.	Students filmed their own collaborations.	2 hours of recorded data over 15 weeks. There were four students. Two were composers and two had other creative arts backgrounds.	Two layers of discourse analysis: interaction analysis & sociocultural discourse analysis.

The review begins with Seddon's (2005) investigations of how jazz musicians 'attune' to each when improvising in preparation for a concert. The framework of this study was later developed by Miell and Littleton (2008) to observe collective understanding being constructed between musicians in a band rehearsal outside of school. Most recently, Dobson's (2012) PhD incorporated both Seddon and Miell & Littleton to design her observations and interviews to explore the processes of creative collaboration. I will briefly highlight the importance of this research thread and make clear how they influence the design of my research.

Seddon's (2005) UK-based research explored how university musicians 'attune' to each when improvising or planning to improvise. Observations were conducted of music rehearsals leading up to a jazz concert with improvisation. Seddon used a video camera to capture how both verbal and non-verbal modes of communication were used by jazz improvisers. Whereas the study by Davidson and Scutt (1999) was unclear concerning the data analysis and interview timelines, Seddon provided a detailed and transparent analysis consisting of five stages of a constant comparison method.

In both studies, the authors determined some of the primary categories prior to the reduction of data. Specifically, they conducted interviews before their first observations and created many of their main categories before immersing themselves in observation data. This process of developing basic themes prior to commencing observations will be reflected throughout the findings of the other key studies (i.e. Miell & Littleton, 2008; Dobson, 2012). These examples prompted awareness that the starting points of my analyses were categories determined by my research questions and refined through the document analysis (see 3.3.1.5). For example, my second research question, (how improvisation is being assessed), forms the key category whereas the sub-categories such as 'Holistic assessment' and 'Criteria-based assessment' were drawn from the document analysis.

Seddon's research was an important model for Miell & Littleton's (2008) UK-based case study of how 'collective understanding' is constructed between musicians in a band rehearsal outside of school. Miell & Littleton modified Seddon's phenomenology-based framework to a socio-cultural framework that allowed the

researchers to locate communicative differences (e.g. directness and criticisms) between *internal* group practices (i.e. rehearsals at home) and external formal music making (i.e. school music classroom). The researchers' methods for observing how meaning and identity were shaped by the ensemble members is strongly resonant for answering my research questions regarding the perceptions of teacher-student-parent triads (RQ3) and how they define improvisation (RQ1).

Elisabeth Dobson's (2012) thesis built upon both Seddon (2005) and Miell & Littleton (2008) to investigate the processes of interdisciplinary creative collaboration (i.e. a music composer collaborating with a visual artist). Like the afore-mentioned studies, it highlights how the power dynamics and types of talk that occur between musician peers outside of formal music lessons can be very different to the teacher-pupil dynamics and talk observed within private one-to-one lessons.

Dobson's (2012) thesis adapted Seddon's (2005) modes of communication to analysing how meaning is constructed and negotiated between musicians during the process of creation. Dobson's observations consisted of two hours of video filmed by the participant pairs (four undergrad students) over 12 weeks as they collaborated towards making a ten-minute film that included music and dance. Using a socio-cultural perspective and observation timescale similar to the one adopted by this thesis (see 3.1.1), Dobson found that the participants used cultural tools of language with computer technology to pursue their common goals. They also found that group roles (e.g. the *teacher*, the *examiner*, the *person that benefits most*) can influence the development of common knowledge in long-term interdisciplinary collaboration. This is important to the development of my methodology because it suggests that perceptions of improvisation (i.e. RQ 3) may differ between participants. These differences can be shaped by tools (language & materials like mp3 backing tracks) and the role of the participants in each case (i.e. teacher, student).

While Dobson (2012) and Miell & Littleton (2008) use sociocultural discourse analysis (SDA) to arrive at their findings, this exact method is not the best suited for my own research. This is because SDA was developed to explore talk between members of a group (i.e. Littleton and Mercer, 2013) but it is not as effective with the dyadic discourse that I will be observing in music lessons. The discourse analysis

that I am using (see CDA in 3.3.1.1) was largely selected because it is flexible enough to be applied to one-to-one teacher/student pairings as well as text and images in documents that they use.

In addition to the research stemming from Seddon (2005), two other studies have influenced my methodology: Nerland (2007) and Zhukov (2013). Nerland used a multiple-case study to explore cultural practices in one-to-one instrumental music lessons at a Norwegian conservatory. Focusing on the dialogue between three university instrument teachers (string, brass & woodwind) and two students of each teacher for three months, Nerland's methods and timeframe influenced my research design because it revealed that the quality of data required could be observed weekly over two months; rather than Davidson & Scutt's (1999) monthly for six months.

Similar to Davidson & Scutt's (1999) study, Nerland's (2007) participants were interviewed (semi-structured) prior to commencing the observations with the goal of establishing key themes to be further investigated during the observations. Whereas Davidson & Scutt were unclear with the details concerning how frequently they communicated with the participants, Nerland was clear in his use of frequent *member-checks* (3.3.2.2) to follow up on questions, data or new themes that arose during the observations. Nerland's methodology and results encouraged me to use member-checks during my observations and to conclude the series of observations with structured interviews in order to confirm my interpretations and reflections.

One last research article that influences my observations-based case study is Zhukov's (2013) exploration of verbal and non-verbal teacher/student interpersonal interactions in higher education instrumental music lessons. Conducted in Australian conservatories, this study distinguishes itself from the other research cited in this section because the observation sites were spread to resist a bias of 'institutional culture' (i.e. the 'conservatoire culture' of Burt-Perkins, 2012). Zhukov's (2013) institutional culture bias influences my research because it suggests that selecting my participants from the same local music hub or school would lessen the reliability of my findings. Accusations that my findings reflect a single music school's culture rather than broader phenomena of instrumental examinations would be difficult to

counter. I will thus select participants that do not attend the same institutions (e.g. schools, teachers, music hubs) to minimise institutional culture.

Concluding the review of methodological literature, I return to my criticisms of the Davidson and Scutt (1999). The following figure presents the questions along with answers derived from the recently reviewed literature. These lessons will be used in the next section to construct the specific details for carrying out the observations and interviews.

Was the use of a six-month timeframe necessary or more beneficial than a shorter timeframe?

Each study (Table 14) used different lengths of time spanning from a few weeks (Miell & Littleton, 2008; Seddon, 2005) to over six months (Davidson & Scutt, 1999). The consistency in the literature is that observations are regularly spaced and capture participants as they work towards a goal such as a performance. Concerning the reality of the three times per year that ABRSM and TCL exams are offered, a span of six weeks (i.e. a reduction of Davidson & Scutt's six months) would be practical for capturing the data that I need to answer my research questions.

What exactly will be transcribed?

Based on Seddon (2005) I will be transcribing all verbal communication that relates to improvisation, assessment and examination board materials. Non-related communications, such as talk about non-improvised sections of the exams, will not be transcribed (developed further in 3.3.3).

How exactly was the data coded?

Both observation and interview data will be coded using *condensation analysis* (see 3.3.3).

What was the unit of analysis?

The 'meaning units', which are 'meaningful chunks… expressed by the subjects' and 'determined by the researcher' (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015, p. 235), were derived from Seddon's (2005) study. My definition is: *a clearly discernible verbal or non-verbal communication between the participants that successfully transmits an idea* (developed further in 3.3.3).

How exactly were the observations conducted?

The researcher audio records the entire music lesson while silently observing. Important non-verbal information was recorded in field notes by the researcher (developed further in 3.3.2.2).

Did the observer make field notes? If so, how were the field notes incorporated?

Field notes are made to capture important non-verbal data such as descriptions of the room and important gestures. The researcher attempts to minimise any notes made during the lessons to minimise distraction to the observation participants (developed further in 3.3.2.2).

Concerning researcher reflexivity, how did the backgrounds and interests of the researcher affect how they interpreted the data over the duration of their research?

In addition to noting self-reflection in a research journal, I will make continuous *member checks* (i.e. Seddon, 2005; Nerland, 2007). These enabled me to compare my interpretations with those of the observation participants. This also increases the validity of my findings and is more ethical than imposing my assumptions on participants' intended meanings.

Appendix I. Condensing the Content of the Observations

The following pages contain excerpts from my data set showing how I condensed (see 'condensation analysis' in 3.3.3) the improvisation-related content of my TCL jazz saxophone observations.

First presented is the table containing the topic of each lesson and subsequent homework assignments. This information was useful for tracking the development of candidate's and teacher's perceptions of improvisation (RQ3) as the examination date neared and passed. The subsequent pages contain an excerpt of a transcription and condensation analysis of the content. This is immediately followed by my extraction of the key themes from the analysis and the *Ideas Template*, a collection of improvisation devices drawn upon by Chad and Sal:

Week	Improvisation in the lesson	Homework assignment
1	They worked on improvisation by creating *Chad's Bag*, a collection of improvisation tools that can be applied to improvising in jazz contexts. Sal linked improvisation to the goal of performing The Camel; which is the blues improvisation task assessed within the performance section of the TCL grade 7 exam.	Practice improvising over The Camel. Write down a new blues melody in the same key as The Camel. The material from this melody can be used for soloing over The Camel.
2	Building upon the previous week, they further worked on Chad's Bag skills for The Camel.	Practice playing along with Aebersold's *Maiden Voyage* and practice reading from *Blue Saxophone Duets* by James Ray.
3	The difference between using a tune and playing over a tune are discussed. Chad's Bag specifics included are • Triad chord tones (this links with technical questions); • Highlighting upper-structures of chords. The use of upper-structures is linked to John Coltrane; • Playing with a relaxed rhythm so as not to rush Yardbird Suite; • Passing notes; • Common tones (i.e. guidelines).	To work on sight reading and improvising over the blues form, Chad was asked to practice specific pages from The Trinity Guildhall *Sound at Sight Saxophone Grades 5-8* Sight-Reading book. And Aebersold's *Blues in All 12 Keys*.
4	Sal assesses Chad's tone after playing Yardbird Suite. It references Charlie Parker and mentions playing "high on the beat", "behind the beat", and "on the beat". They work on the 8-chord improvisation test from the exam.	Sal is to work on his tone and the melody of Yard Bird Suite.
5	Most of this lesson is spent preparing details for the upcoming examination. Chad chooses the order that he will perform his pieces in. *The Camel*, a blues melody followed by an improvisation over a blues form in E major, is second. This is what Chad has been working on since I began observations with his composition and practice of Chad's Blues. This section gives him the most opportunity to utilise his ideas template. After a few minutes of sight-reading, Chad and Chad work on the Aural Improvisation assessment for the exam.	Sal suggests practicing everything in the exam. Special focus should be on reading the chord symbols and not the music notes. The symbols seem to trip up Chad which I find interesting because this is an "Aural" test, but it hinges upon reading and interpreting chord symbols.
TCL Grade 7 Jazz Saxophone Examination		
6	Chad tells Sal that the only part of the exam that he had trouble with was the performance of *Tough Guys*. Chad admits to making mistakes (8-14). (This is something that I will follow up on when I interview Chad. I am curious about perceptions of mistakes and how they exist in the contexts of assessed improvisation and non-improvised pieces). Sal asks about the aural improvisation task. Chad excitedly tells a funny anecdote about the examiner not being prepared because he 'hadn't done it for ages!'	Concluding their discussion about how the exam went, Sal turns the discussion to Chad's upcoming GCSEs and starts suggesting ideas for this new post-exam goal. Sal also mentions that they should work more on sight reading

Excerpt from Lesson 1 of TCL Jazz Saxophone Observations (25 May 2016)

	Speaker	Dialogue	Condensed Themes	Coding
1.	Sal	Oh good, you were writing a blues chorus:	This composed blues chorus was Chad's assignment from last week. It uses many elements from the improvisation lessons. Composition is being used to develop and formalize improvisation.	Improvisation …as prep for (composition)
2.	Chad	I tried to. It might be a bit messy.		
3.	Sal	It looks good to me (Sal peruses the hand-written page of sheet music). Great…This looks like fun. Let's have a warm up with something (Sal begins playing very fast scales). Right, let's warm up with something. We've done all the scales. We've done all the pieces apart from the tune (referring to the blues tune that Chad is writing). That's a piece of cake. You'll eat that for breakfast: which is good. And we just need to do the improvising section. We'll do that at some other point with the blues stuff. Really, we've looked at everything. The chord types, there are maybe just one or two different chord types. And the rest of it is like a piece of cake. A doddle. How's your sight reading these days? (silence) Maybe we'll have a sight read through something at the end. What do you reckon?	The structure of the lesson is planned around sections of the exam: technical work, Performance pieces, improvisation, sight reading.	IML: Specific skill ES: Prac/Perf
4.	Chad	Yeah.		
5.	Sal	OK. Cool. Hey, so what have you written here (referring to the blues written on the sheet of paper).		
6.	Chad	I repeated that theme.		
7.	Sal	Was there like a method? How many bars have you got? You've got those two and then 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Good stuff. Good. Look's good to me. Ok, let's have a look at… let's start off with… let do something else for a warm up. Let's do something in E7. So just start off with a long E. (Both hold a low E and while Chad maintains the E, Sal plays the 3rd, then the 5th, then the 7th of the E7 chord). Sounds good to me. Let's play root, third, seventh of E7 (together they play E, G#, D, G#. Chad plays G natural instead of G# by mistake ascending but is correct on the way down). Let's do it up to top E (Sal plays E, G# D, E up and down for two octaves. Then both do it together slower). Very good excellent. Let's play the scale (they play a two-octave E mixolydian scale up and down). Good. Now swing it (Sal snaps his fingers on 2 & 4 while singing the rhythm. Both then play the two-octave mixolydian scale again but with a swing rhythm). One of the things they'll ask you for on the exam is either tongue-slurred or swung. So that	The warm up is based on E7, a key and chord featured in the improvisation task of the exam. The notes of the chord, the fingerings on the saxophone and the articulation/rhythm are influenced by the preparation for the exam. Chad is composing a melody in E blues that combines techniques that he has been learning in regard to improvisation. This task links improvisation,	1 Goals: Exam-centred. 2 …As preparation for improv (technical exercises and warm-ups)

		will be this last version. Tongue on the off-beats. OK, let's play this thing and see where we left off the last time. (Points to blues sheet music) From there (snaps fingers) Up, two, three. (They both sight read through the music that Chad wrote in unison). Let's go back on this stuff in a second. Nice playing. Hey, I love this line (points). *Upper structures*. Beautiful. Well-written. Let's go from the second chorus and stop when we get to the blues bit (Sal quickly plays the 'blues bit'). (Both play in unison). So, this is the chromatic bit. It goes between the third, the fifth and the seventh (shows fingering to chad for each of those three notes). Again? Let's go. Two, three (both play again together). Nice. Good stuff. Excellent. Alright then, so point to me what you've got. What you wrote.	composition, harmony and notation skills. (Chad's Bag) Use of upper-structure notes, chromaticism, blues & arpeggios is requested and praised.	Contexts: Devices
8	Chad	(Pointing to the page) This stuff in here.		
9	Sal	So, this is the blues and then you've got most of the third chorus.		
10	Chad	Yeah.		
11	Sal	OK. Super. Where do you want to go from? Here? Or do you want to go from this blues bit?		
12	Chad	Yeah, I'll go from there.		
13	Sal	Take it away.		
14	Chad	(Chad plays the blues head that he wrote by himself. He keeps his eyes on the page of music the whole time).		
15	Sal	Yeah, I can really hear what you are doing with the harmony here. Good work. So actually, it kind of wraps it up. We didn't need the turnaround there at the end. So, let's have a look. Play me this again (points at the page).		
16	Chad	(Plays a segment that shares many common notes as the beginning of *Summertime*).	An improvisation skill is mentioned: the ability to quote phrases and re-use them. A phrase from *Summertime* features in an unexpected location.	Contexts: Devices
17	Sal	Saint James Infirmary? Is that right?		
18	Chad	I'm not sure.		
19	Sal	Or is it one of the Charlie Parker things?		
20	Chad	No. Not quite.		
21	Sal	What is it? Where is it from?		
22	Chad	I'm not sure.		
23	Sal	Have a think on it. OK, again. From here (points). From the blues bit (Sal plays the phrase on his saxophone). Ah one (snap), ah two (snap).		
24	Chad	(Plays the phrase with Sal).		
25	Sal	So how did you mean this bit? Is it supposed to be "One, da dah dum dah da?"		
26	Chad	Yeah.		
27	Sal	OK. Cool. Let's bring in a little bit of stuff. (Sal leans over Chad's handwritten page	(Chad's Bag) *Enclosing* is a key concept in all six of their	Contexts: Devices

		with a pencil and eraser and starts rewriting/cleaning up Chad's notation). So, this should be a crotchet rest really because it's "One. Ba Da dah dum dah da". So that phrase starts on the two. That sounds great. It's just a little thing. (Sal keeps scanning the page). I like what you've done here, enclosing the triad. (Sal starts snapping his fingers and says, "play that."	lessons. Chad is consistently reminded that it is good to enclose notes.	
28	Chad	(Chad plays the phrase that Sal points at).		
29	Sal	OK. Excellent (Chad stops playing). I like this. Really nice. I like what you've done here, another enclosure. And then the G triad… upper structures (smiles and nods). I like that. So, let's go from here. Go from the same bit from the E (starts counting and snapping figures).	(Chad's Bag) Enclosing is praised again and so is the use of upper-structure notes over chords.	Contexts: Devices
30	Chad	(Plays with his eyes on the page. Sal corrects some of the notation such as stems going the wrong way).		
31	Sal	So, let's just do this last bit. "Chad's Blues" we'll call it (He writes this title at the top of the page). It's really nice that you're writing stuff that doesn't just involve the roots, even though we used the root last time a lot. But you know it's really nice that you are writing lines that do not go down to the root note every time. It's nice to use the middle parts of the chords and the upper structures. Play it again.	(Chad's Bag) A third improvisation element is mentioned, using chord tones other than the root note. Upper-structure use is praised again.	Contexts: Devices
32	Sal	(Chad plays the whole head from the start). You know, the rhythm is really good there and the rhythm is so important. I like this (points to the page) Jumping across the bar line, "bah-DUH". Really good. Pre-meditating the chord change.	(Chad's Bag) Strong rhythm and placement of anticipation note (pre-meditating the change) are praised.	
33	Chad	I haven't written any chords though.		
34	Sal	No, but you heard it which is good. It's nice because here we have E7 that goes to A7 and you've pre-meditated that A7 change by jumping in the quaver beforehand, which is really nice instead of just going "beat 1, A" You know?	(Chad's Bag) Pre-meditating the chord change is praised again.	Contexts: Devices
35	Chad	Yeah.		
36	Sal	From here again. One, two. (Both play together with eyes on the page). OK. Good. So, we're faced with a problem.		
37	Chad	Ok.		
38	Sal	The problem is, here we have A7. We pre-meditated we jumped into it. And then we have this one and it goes back to A7 here, right?		Contexts: Devices
39	Chad	Uh-huh		
40	Sal	Right. So A7 here, what are the key notes of A7?		
41	Chad	A7?		
42	Sal	Yeah.		
43	Chad	A, C, (corrects himself) C#, and E		
44	Sal	E, like you said. Here we've got a G#. So, you could put that in (meaning the G# which is the major 7th, not the dominant	Several devices are co-ordinated to go together in a sequence.	Contexts: Devices

		7th) which is optional because you have this chromatic thing here. So why don't we prepare this straight down the line so that we prepare this chromatic thing. So, we just literally play the triad (sings the notes) Just like we did in a few of the other things. Like we started on the 3rd, went down the inversion and back up again.		
45	Chad	Yeah.		
46	Sal	You can do exactly the same thing here. So, start on the third. Go down the inversion and come back up. So, there's no fireworks, but then we bang in your chromatic business. Holy-moly. They don't know what's hit them! So, so instead of going (Sal plays an example), they hear (Sal plays a slightly different example). And that resolves really nicely. Kind of rolls off it and it's also referencing some of the stuff that you've done over here, right the (plays an example). And all of this (plays an example). And that sounds great. A really nice line. And you go up to an E, right?	The device of arpeggiating from the third is demonstrated to be repeatable/transposable. The device of a chromatic run to a target note is alluded to here. Chromaticism combined with the arpeggio is exciting! Notes that are technically incorrect for a chord can be recontextualised as being part of an exciting chromatic run. Quoting material is praised again.	Contexts: Devices
47	Chad	Yeah.		
48	Sal	Ah. A over an E7. Which note is that?		
49	Chad	That is the fourth.		
50	Sal	The fourth. Let me play it for you. Did you play any of this on the piano with the voicing? Ok so (plays the dominant chord on the piano with the 4th in the top). Oh crumbs (reacting to the dissonance). It's nice as like a passing note. You know that kind of thing (Moves down from the 4th scale-wise while holding the chord beneath). You can use it as a SUS moving to something else but if you're resting on it, it sounds kind of dissonant. So, this phrase here (indicating the music sheet and plays it on the piano) it feels like it wants to go somewhere else. To resolve it, and you've kind of left it. So why don't we do something with that? We've got this lovely thing… Oh I know what we can do. Let's bring back that second chorus and bring back that chromatic phrase. Right? Because here we've got A over E7 and we've resolved very strongly (sings the melody). Let's play from here (sings while picking up the saxophone). And instead of going to the G#, we'll aim for the G# and bung in a G natural and go for the G# in the end. Do you remember that from (plays the opening of Charlie Parker's solo from 'Now's the Time')? That's more Charlie Parker. Shamelessly ripping Charlie Parker.	Another use of a chromatic run is described. This time it recontextuallises a dissonant 4th into a strongly resolving phrase. Overall structure is referenced and designed Charlie Parker solo is referenced.	Contexts: Devices Improvisation: Mistakes Improvisation: structure Context: Masters
51	Chad	OK.		

52	Sal	So, let's go from the start of the chorus (count and snaps fingers. Both play until the chromatic phrase and stop). Alright, so, there it feels like you've landed somewhere, right?		
53	Chad	Yeah.		
54	Sal	And here I've been naughty and just got rid of the B cause there's no room. If you've got this triad there's no room to drop down to the B so we just drop down to the C# (plays). What do you reckon?		
55	Chad	Sounds good.		
56	Sal	Do you remember this lovely thing you did over here? A7 and you went G, B, G, E, C#. Upper structures. Upper structure heaven. So great. Why don't we do something like that here because here we've got A7 and that F# is begging to be a G. Let's play that. From that B and then we'll just play this bar. 1,2, 3, (they both play the phrase together). And again, but this time with those upper structures. So, play me from "bah bud da bah" (Both play the phrase and stop suddenly when they play a differing note) this should be a G natural. (Both resume playing in synchronicity). So, what happens in bar 8? Where are we going?	Use of upper-structures is praised. Upper-structures are quoted/referenced in another section. Structure/architecture of improvisation through a turnaround is planned in advance through line 60.	Contexts: Devices Improvisation: Form
57	Chad	Oh, do we have a two five?		
58	Sal	Yes, we do have a two five. This is good. What does the two five do?		
59	Chad	It prepares.		
60	Sal	Your absolutely right. It prepares the turnaround. And what is the turnaround? It's basically the two five again. So, we have a two five one from F# minor. So, the chord in this bar preparing for the F# will be… What is the chord?	The roll of a two five chord progression is eventually established and surmised.	IML: Formalising
61	Chad	C#7		
62	Sal	Yes. G# minor. C#7. And here you've totally smashed it starting on the third and coming down. I love this thing that you've done here. So, you've actually bunged an E triad there (E, G#, B over the C# root). Just play that up to the C# and I will play the root notes. 1, 2, 3 (They play together). That is super-hip. (Sal plays the chords on the piano while chad plays the line on the sax). That works. I actually kind of like this. Going straight into this. Bah duh buh da Bah duh (slaps hands). So why did you jump all the way down there? (Plays a phrase that descends to a low note).	Starting on the third of the C# arpeggio creates an E triad (over the unplayed C# root) is "super-hip" and "totally smashed it"	Contexts: Devices (upper-structure triads)
63	Chad	I wanted it to act like an enclosure, so I went down an octave and then up.	Chad creates an enclosure using very wide intervals	Contexts: Devices

64	Sal	Oh. I like that. So, you want (plays). So those two phrases kind of cancel each other out in the middle. I like that. Good thinking. I like the architecture you put into it. You get points for enclosures. (Sal plays Chad's enclosure again and makes variations on it). So where does it go from there? (Chad plays the next phrase that he wrote during the last week).	Sal is impressed with Chad's thinking regarding the enclosure device.	
65	Sal	Ok, so let's just think about this. So, you've got B7 and you've got an E?!?!	Sal identifies another potentially "wrong" note (again the fourth degree of a dominant seventh chord).	Improvisation: Mistakes (65-75
66	Chad	Yeah.		
67	Sal	Holy moly! You're pushing the boat out with four over one. And then you've got a B, a C natural.		Improvisation: Mistakes
68	Chad	That might be a sharp. It might sound better if I (shows fingering of a note sequence to Sal and then plays it).	Chad suggests an idea about how to recontextualise the wrong note. First Chad demonstrates with his fingers on the sax…	Improvisation: Mistakes
69	Sal	You know what might sound good? You've got two enclosures here.	… then Sal offers the solution of turning the wrong note into part of an enclosure.	Contexts: Devices (enclosure)
70	Chad	Yeah.		
71	Sal	This one's like dropping down a third. So, you've got a biggish enclosure and then you've got like that (shows fingering to Chad). So, what you could do is turn these into crotchets: Bah doo DAH. Bah doo DAH (the sung rhythm is two quavers followed by a short, accented crotchet). And then you've got strong notes on strong beats.	Sal demonstrates his enclosure solution with his fingers. Incorporates the technique of using a strong rhythm to help. (Showing each other fingerings instead of naming notes was central to this particular exchange). Necessity of strong notes on strong beats mentioned.	Contexts: Devices (enclosure) Improvisation: Mistakes Contexts: Devices (rhythm)
72	Chad	Yeah.		
73	Sal	Rather than (sings a few examples) That phrase needs really strong notes in particular places.		Contexts: Devices (rhythm)
74	Chad	Yeah.		
75	Sal	So, you could carry on that line and then you've done enclosures all the way up. What do you reckon? Something like this (plays an example). And then you're enclosing all the way up and it sounds great. Really nice pattern. I like that. Should bung that in (indicating that it should be written into the assignment to compose a blues melody in E). So here we've got a five one. Do you remember what we have in these two bars here?	Enclosing is developed building a melodic pattern around it.	Contexts: Devices (enclosure)
76	Chad	A turnaround.		
77	Sal	Absolutely right. What does it do?	Sal tests Chad about the turnaround chords and their functions (75-82).	

78	Chad	It prepares for the next chord.	Chad states that the purpose of a turnaround, which is several bars long, is to prepare for the next chord.	IML: Formalising Improvisation: Form
79	Sal	So what chords do we use?	Sal tests chad	
80	Chad	They use something really strange. So, they have a two five here to prepare for…	Chad analyses the blues turnaround	
81	Sal	Yeah, exactly, an F# minor and B7 here.	"Two Five" is translated into "F# minor and B7"	
82	Chad	And then they put a two five for the F (he means F#) one in there instead of like the G#.		IML: Formalising
83	Sal	Yeah, so they said, "this is similar enough" and then they go "Chord six" with the C# minor. So, we've landed an F# over an E7th, which is the ninth. Let's play it all the way through and I will play some rubbish piano behind you, so we can hear how it works. (Begins playing chords) I've warned Patrick about my terrible piano playing. (Snaps fingers and counts to three to begin).	A "strange" chord pattern is introduced in the assessment materials. Chad and Sal formalise the chord functions and note choices. Sal acknowledges the researcher in the room.	IML: Formalising
84	Chad	(Chad plays the melody he wrote while Sal plays piano).		
85	Sal	Ok cool! Nice one! Let's do it again a little bit slower.		
86	Chad	(Chad plays it again to Sal piano playing).		
87	Sal	So, we just need to wrap it up. How can we do this? Let's have a think about this. We've used some nice blues business. And we've got all these repetitive things all the way through and lots of landing on one. And then why don't we aim to finish here at the end of that bar on beat one. Just to finish it up. Let me just write something out for you so you can hear what it is. (Writes with a pencil on the page) One, bah duh buh Bah Bah DUH! (Snaps fingers) Just play it for me.	Sal point out three improvisation devises: Blues, repetition and strong rhythm. Sal seriously takes over composing the ending of Chad's music.	Contexts: Devices (Blues scales) Contexts: Devices (Quoting melodic phrases) Contexts: Devices (Using a strong rhythm)
88	Chad	(Chad plays the line Sal just wrote while Sal plays the piano).		
89	Sal	Just wraps it up and so you feel like it comes full circle. Do you remember that Miles Davis thing you were checking out that starts in one place and then comes 'round again? He wraps it up with the same phrase that he started off with. A nice way of thinking. A kind of thematic thing. So how are we going to get there? So, it feels like we'll end on the E7 but actually we'll finish on the C#. Do you have headphones?	Sal refers to a lesson learned from a Miles Davis solo: quoting from your own melody rather than someone else in order to wrap up the end of your improvisation. This involves architectural planning.	Contexts: Masters Contexts: Devices (Quoting melodic phrases) Improvisation: Form
90	Chad	Yeah.		
91	Sal	Good. If you get them then we can play along with the backing track instead of my rubbish piano playing. (Sal uses his laptop to play the CD backing track *Blues in E* from Aebersold's Blues in All Twelve Keys (recommended by TCL for improvising during alto sax grade 7 piece, *The Camel*). Both listen to the backing track through headphones and play the	TCL backing tracks used to support and bring together elements from the lessons as well as the homework assignment from the last week.	Exam Sections: Improvisation Task

		blues head 'Chad's Blues in unison 47:30). So, it really all makes sense now, doesn't it? Putting together all of those building blocks and then even at the end we're wrapping up with the same phrase (sings examples) Thinking of it not just in terms of notes but as rhythmic cells as well.	Sal provides a strong summation of the 'building blocks' that he has been giving to Chad in preparation for the exam.	Contexts: Devices Improvisation: Form
92	Chad	Yeah.		
93	Sal	(Sings more) So once again with the backing track. This is the track that you'll be playing with for the exam by the way.	Importance of backing track in specific regards to the TCL exam is expressed.	Exam Sections: Improvisation Task
94	Chad	Yeah.		
95	Sal	He will count us in (meaning the recorded voice on the backing track). It's quite slow as well meaning that we can really groove into it. (Both play along to the recorded backing track that will be used in the exam).	In the exam, the voice on the backing track dictates the starting time and tempo. The groove is in part determined by the backing track.	Exam Sections: Improvisation Task
96	Sal	Sounds great right?		
97	Chad	Yeah.		
98	Sal	So now it's time to rate the solo. So, when we improvise and we use this as an ideas template, what can we take from it? Just like what we do with the Charlie Parker. What can we pinch from it? What can we pinch from your own stuff?	"Ideas template" is named. Borrowing from the improvisations of masters is referenced with mention of borrowing from one's self.	RQ2 Contexts: Masters Contexts: Devices (Quoting)
99	Chad	(Silence as he doesn't seem to know what to say).		
100	Sal	Let's start from the start then. Let's just talk through it chronologically. So, what do we have here? (Snaps fingers and sings).		
101	Chad	A repeated rhythm.	Repeated rhythm is identified from Sal singing and finger snapping.	Contexts: Devices (repeated rhythmic phrases)
102	Sal	Yes. And we talked about this a long while ago that if you play something very assertively (sings and snaps fingers). I could be playing all the wrong notes and it would sound at least half right if it were a super-strong phrase, right?	Assertive playing can partially correct re-contextualise the wrong into the right.	Contexts: Devices (repeated rhythmic phrases)102-104 Improvisation: Mistakes
103	Chad	Yeah.		
104	Sal	It's moving. It's organic. What do we have here? (Sal points at Chad's hand-written music)	This is the 3rd time Luis has stated, "It's moving. It's organic" as something positive. This can link to the term "flow" favoured by examiners?	
105	Chad	Uhm, triad.		
106	Sal	E7 triad, right? We do this all the way through. So, we've got starting on the third and no one will know because it starts on the third and no one spots triads starting on the third. So, we've got (plays	Chord starting on the third rather than the root is recalled with a reference to how transposing the same arpeggio to other chords is	Contexts: Devices (Arpeggios from the third)

		examples of playing 3, 5,3,1 across different chords). It's a piece of cake and value for money. We've got this business here. What was it?	"a piece of cake and value for money."	Contexts: Devices (transposing melodic patterns)
107	Chad	Chromatic.	Chromatic runs are recalled…	Contexts: Devices (chromatic sequence)
108	Sal	Chromatic up to the?		
109	Chad	Third.	…as they lead to a target.	
110	Sal	The third. C#. Whatever it is, the chromatic alone gets you points. You get points for that. Jazz points. Which is nice, that kind of leading across bar lines. So, we've got chromatic approaches. We've got triads. Let's make a list. Let's call the list Chad's bag. So, in Chad's bag we've got triads, and the triads can start on the third or they can start in other places as well. Then we've got chromatic approach, right?	Chromatic sequence to target note gets "jazz points." It's nice to lead a chromatic sequence across bar lines. The "ideas template" is personalized as Chad's Bag. Chromatic approaches and triads that do not start on roots are placed in the bag.	Contexts: Devices (chromatic sequence) Contexts: Devices (Arpeggios from the third). Contexts: Devices) (Arpeggio Patterns Contexts: Devices (chromatic sequence)
111	Chad	Uhm.		
112	Sal	So, if we're playing the blues and we've got G# minor coming up and you go, "Crumbs, G# minor, what on earth am I going to do?" You go with the last two notes F#, G into G# or if you can think ahead you can think exactly the third of G# minor is B. And think great, I'm gonna play A, A#/Bb and then just finish on the B. What else have we got? We've got the carried-on theme. We've got sevenths, we've got thirds all that usual business. We've got arpeggios with all the notes in there, root, 3rd 7th, 9th. I would go through all of these chord types and practice that shape in all of them (Sal plays an example of an arpeggio starting on the third of the chord). What should we call that?	Use of chromatics to approach a new bar line or chord are mentioned as a mechanical device associated with preparation. So, if you don't know what to do with a minor 7th chord, Sal suggests using a chromatic device. The two options are move chromatically from the b7 to the root or move chromatically from the root to the b3.	Contexts: Devices (chromatic sequence) Contexts: Devices (Quoting) Contexts: Devices) (Arpeggio Patterns Contexts: Devices (Arpeggios from the third).
113	Chad	Call that modified arpeggio.	Chad names the improvisation device of an arpeggio beginning on the third "modified arpeggio."	Contexts: Devices (Arpeggios from the third).
114	Sal	I like it (writes it into Chad's Bag). With the 9th. (Sal then plays examples of each of the items in Chad's bag and instructs Chad to practice this week by	Sal recaps his "Ideas Template" as Chad's Bag. He clearly demonstrates the tools in Chad's Bag including the Chad-named	Contexts: Devices

		incorporating them into his improvisations over the backing track). So, I'd like you to practice your improv this week. I'd like you to focus on not writing the stuff but improvising using the stuff we've written. Triads, chromatics, your modified 9th arpeggio and the chromatics going from the 3rd to the fifth.	"modified arpeggio." The goal is to practice them into the context of playing along with the CD backing track in preparation for the grade 7 examination.	
115	Chad	Should I try it just with this piece?		
116	Sal	Just with this piece, the blues. For sure. Does that make sense?	The goal is to apply the tools in Chad's Bag to the examination piece only.	Goals: Exam-centred Goals: Music-centred
117	Chad	Yes.		
118	Sal	The other things we need to do for the exam, sight reading, and we're pretty much set. We just need to have a look at the improv assessment thing, but you'll fly through that. This feeds into it nicely (meaning the tune they worked on for most of the lesson) because it's the same thing. They just give you a chord sequence and you've got to make your own improv thing.	Improv assessment mentioned as a separate exam section requiring separate preparation. However, the devices used for the performance section blues improvisation 'feeds into this'. Sal describes the assessment as "They just give you a chord sequence and you've got to make **your own improv thing**."	1. Exam Sections: Improv task 2. Exam Sections: Performance (perf. section links to improve task) 3. IML: Prompted stimulus 4. RQ3: Ownership
125	Chad	I've never done that before.		
126	Sal	It's basically this, but just with a chord sequence that they've given you. If you've looked at all these things and you've got things you can put into there. Your triads, your chromatic approaches, your this and that. That's just the way into it. I'd really like to just focus on the improv this week. Strong rhythms.	Sal explains in brief what to expect in the exam and how Chad can apply the items from Chad's Bag to the exam. He is asked to work and focus on improv separately this week.	1. Exam Sections: Improv Task 2. RQ3: Ownership 3. Contexts: Devices (chromatic) 4. Contexts: Devices (strong rhythms)
127	Chad	Yeah.		
128	Sal	Nice one, old chap… (the lesson concludes with chit chat).		

Sal uses the term "Ideas Template" (line 98) to draw together separate concepts of improvisation that he has teaching Chad. These included:

- Quoting phrases. Quotes can be from others. For example, some of the melody of Summertime is used by Chad is his music creation (see 16). Quoting can also be from yourself, such as replaying a phrase that you opened with (89 & 98). Sal referenced an earlier lesson from a Miles Davis'

improvisation when teaching this, which relates to musical contest, genre and culture.

- Repeated rhythm. Just as melodic phrases can be quoted, so can specific rhythms (see 101)

- Avoiding starting on the roots of the chords (62, 106). Sal shows Chad how to start on the 3rd degree of a chord instead (Chad terms this a "Modified Arpeggio" in line 113). An improvisation tool is created by playing an arpeggio beginning on the 3rd of a dominant chord and then transposing the same arpeggio to the next dominant 7th chord. The device sounds like the opening melody of *Saint Luis Blues* (I hate to see… oh I hate to see).

- Using upper-structure chord notes. When improvising over an A7 chord, Chad is praised for moving beyond the basic triad notes of A, C#, E, to include the next notes in the sequence, G, B, D (these notes are commonly referred to as an upper-structure or upper-structure triad because they act like a second triad placed on top of the A triad).

- Enclosing a note. I was not initially familiar with the term enclosing in this context. Sal explained to Chad (and confirmed with me after the lesson) that to enclose a note is to approach it with both an ascending and descending sequence. An example of enclosing the note D might would be F, E (descending), then B, C, (ascending) finishing at the target note of D (F, E, B, C, D).

- Chromatic sequence to a target note. Sal gives examples of this in two different contexts. The first use is when approaching the root note of a chord that is less familiar. For example, Sal suggests to Chad that a G# minor seven chord can be approached chromatically from two notes beneath the root (F#, G, G#).

- This is also explained as a tool for anticipating the next bar (which terms "pre-meditating the change"). To premeditate the change is to be aware of the next chord in advance and approach it by using one of the devices.

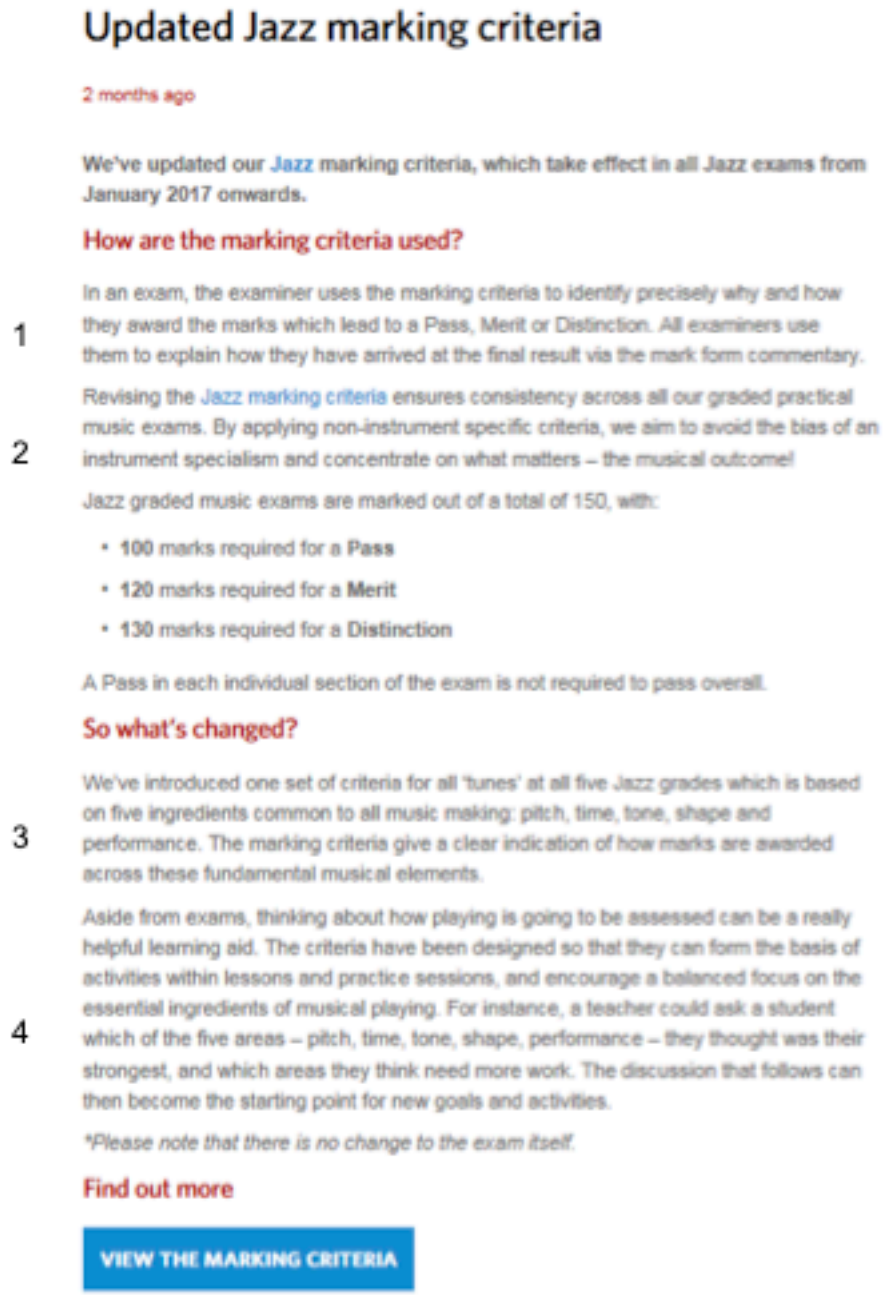
A second use of the chromatic device is to re-contextualise a note that might not be too dissonant. There were times when Chad targeted the 4th degree of a dominant 7th chord and created what Sal felt was a concern because it created a dissonant sound (He did not say wrong note). Sal showed Chad how after playing the dissonant note, he could keep moving chromatically until arriving at a more consonant note thus resolving the phrase. It is worth note that Sal never describes a note as being "wrong". Instead his descriptions appear to me to be more about how to re-contextualise a note that is too dissonant; never how to fix a wrong note. Thus, Chad is never told about wrong notes in improvisation, which is something his examiner will be listening for.

- Using a strong rhythm. In addition to helping an improviser outline beat one, Sal explains that using a strong rhythm can make any phrase of notes sound right.
- Sal plays sequences of random notes with conviction and there is nothing in them that could I interpret as being a 'wrong note.' This indicates another importance of context in phrasing a sequence of notes.
- Combining devices: a strong rhythm + enclosure (see 69-71). Sal demonstrates how enclosing a not and approaching it with a strong rhythm can create a strong sense of finality to a phrase or improvisation. He does not state it, but his example also incorporates "pre-meditating a note."

Sal also reference to past jazz masters. For example, the improvisation device of quoting/restating from the first part of your solo is linked to Miles Davis. 'Enclosing a note' and chromatic runs are linked to lessons learned from Charlie Parker.

Appendix J. ABRSM & TCL Important Blog Updates

ABRSM:



Updated Jazz marking criteria

2 months ago

We've updated our Jazz marking criteria, which take effect in all Jazz exams from January 2017 onwards.

How are the marking criteria used?

1 In an exam, the examiner uses the marking criteria to identify precisely why and how they award the marks which lead to a Pass, Merit or Distinction. All examiners use them to explain how they have arrived at the final result via the mark form commentary.

2 Revising the Jazz marking criteria ensures consistency across all our graded practical music exams. By applying non-instrument specific criteria, we aim to avoid the bias of an instrument specialism and concentrate on what matters – the musical outcome!

Jazz graded music exams are marked out of a total of 150, with:

- **100** marks required for a **Pass**
- **120** marks required for a **Merit**
- **130** marks required for a **Distinction**

A Pass in each individual section of the exam is not required to pass overall.

So what's changed?

3 We've introduced one set of criteria for all 'tunes' at all five Jazz grades which is based on five ingredients common to all music making: pitch, time, tone, shape and performance. The marking criteria give a clear indication of how marks are awarded across these fundamental musical elements.

4 Aside from exams, thinking about how playing is going to be assessed can be a really helpful learning aid. The criteria have been designed so that they can form the basis of activities within lessons and practice sessions, and encourage a balanced focus on the essential ingredients of musical playing. For instance, a teacher could ask a student which of the five areas – pitch, time, tone, shape, performance – they thought was their strongest, and which areas they think need more work. The discussion that follows can then become the starting point for new goals and activities.

**Please note that there is no change to the exam itself.*

Find out more

VIEW THE MARKING CRITERIA

Figure 12 ABRSM updated jazz marking criteria.[129]

[129] Retrieved from: http://gb.abrsm.org/en/about-abrsm/news-articles-and-comment/latest-news/article/updated-jazz-marking-criteria/764/ 2 March 2017

I have inserted numbers next to the key points of the marking criteria update (Figure 12) to help guide the attention of the reader. The corresponding points are addressed below:

1. All examiners use the same marking criteria to assess 'musical outcome' to be able to 'explain how they have arrived at the final result';
2. Revising the Jazz Marking criteria ensures consistency across all 'graded practical music exams';
3. One set of non-instrument specific criteria is used across all levels of jazz assessments based on what the ABRSM perceives to be the 'five ingredients common to all music-making: pitch, time, tone, shape and performance';
4. The ABRSM have designed the new criteria to be the basis of music lessons.

The key item that is noticeably absent from the marking update is 'improvisation'. This is surprising because the ABRSM's jazz-genre examinations mention 'improvisation' in relation to all four examination sections: *Performance*, *Scales & Arpeggios*, *Aural Tests* and *Quick Study*[130]. The omission of 'improvisation' becomes more perplexing when one considers that the ABRSM have updated their criteria to mark what they perceive the 'five ingredients common to all music making', but do not include improvisation, which is a key ingredient common to jazz practice.

The ABRSM's *jazz marking criteria* update suggests that while improvisation is integral to jazz and to the ethos underpinning the ABRSM Jazz Syllabus, improvisation is not one of the 'five ingredients' of music-making and therefore not integral to the marking criteria within a graded jazz examination (Appendix F).

One month after the 'Updated Jazz Marking Criteria' headline was published it was replaced with fresher news unrelated to improvisation. The lack of permanent prominent placement of 'Updated Jazz Marking Criteria' or other references to improvisation are relevant to the third research question because it indicates that

[130] Retrieved from: http://abrsm.org/en/our-exams/jazz-exams 10 September 2016

The ABRSM perceives updates to improvisation-rich marking criteria as meriting a temporary prominent 'News' article on their Home Page. However, improvisation assessment is not perceived as salient enough to be placed in a permanent prominent position.

Trinity College London:

Like the ABRSM, TCL has a headline section labelled 'News' on their Home Page consisting of the three most-recently published news headlines that hyperlink to posts on different webpages. At the time of my sampling, two of the three blog headlines were related to music, including an education-related new partnership with Musical Futures and an official recognition by the UK government's Chevening Scholarship.[131] The most relevant headline to my research was published shortly after my September 2016 data collection: 'Trinity's supporting tests for graded music exams to change from January 2017' (uploaded on 25 Nov 2016).[132] The full text is provided below:

Improvisation

Unique to Trinity's exams, this option assesses candidates' ability to improvise fluently and creatively in response to a musical stimulus.

One of the principal aims in revising the improvisation requirements has been to make the tests more musically authentic – testing real improvising skills. Three options will be available:

- stylistic stimulus: an improvisation over a notated piano part played by the examiner
- motivic stimulus: an unaccompanied improvisation in response to a short melodic fragment
- harmonic stimulus: an unaccompanied improvisation in response to a chord sequence

Updated specifications are now available, in addition to example stimuli for all grades.

Please visit the supporting tests page for full details.

Figure 13 Trinity College 'news': improvisation update.[133]

The key points of the assessment News update are:

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[131] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.com 10 September 2016
[132] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.com/news/viewarticle.php?id=463 9 February 2017
[133] Retrieved from: http://www.trinitycollege.com/news/viewarticle.php?id=463 12 Feb Sept 2017

- The Aural Test Improvisation option is 'unique' (i.e. has an edge over ABRSM) because it assesses how a candidate improvises in response to a choice of three types of musical stimulus;
- The three improvisation task options provide a contextual flexibility not available before or with any other assessment board.

Regarding the first point that the Aural Test Improvisation option is unique because it assesses how a candidate improvises in response to a musical stimulus, this statement suggests that TCL is aiming to achieve a higher validity by assessing the candidates in context resembling a more real-world improvisation experience. TCL confirms this by adding that a principle aim is to test 'real improvisation skills' by making the tests 'more musically authentic' (Figure 13).

The second point, that the improvisation task options provide greater contextual flexibility, is based on the candidate having the choice between three different types of improvisation stimuli; *motivic*, *stylistic* and *harmonic*. The *motivic response* option is comparable to the ABRSM Quick Study improvisation assessment because both require candidates to improvise an unaccompanied response to an examiner-provided stimulus using a specific scale and number of bars.

The more ecologically-valid updates are the 'stylistic stimulus' option, which resembles how a classical genre performer may structure a cadenza by improvising over notated piano accompaniment, and the 'harmonic stimulus' option, which resembles how a jazz improviser would approach improvising over a lead sheet[134]. TCL's inclusion of 'stylistic' and 'harmonic' improvisation options provides strong support for their claim to have more 'musically-authentic' assessment options than their competition.

A key finding from earlier in this section is that the ABRSM's News story about marking criteria updates (Figure 12) was posted on the Home Page for less than one

[134] A 'lead sheet' is a simplified sketch of music notation that often shows chord symbols, basic melody and bar lines rather than pre-composed notation dots.

month before it was replaced by fresher news. TCL did the same thing by posting a news headline concerning improvisation supporting tests for less than one month. The inclusion of updates to the improvisation assessment regulations as headlines in the "News" section of the Home Page by both the ABRSM and TCL gives evidence that both boards perceive updates to their improvisation criteria as important news. However, the perceived importance of improvisation assessment with ABRSM and TCL is diminished since they do not merit a fixed display and instead appear as 'News' headlines that are replaced with fresher news within a month's time (e.g. 'Winners of the Christmas book giveaway announced).[135]

[135] ABRSM's 'Updated Jazz Marking Criteria' was posted on 20 Dec 2016 and was later bumped from www.abrsm.org/en/home during January 2017. TCL's '2017 Improvisation Assessment Regulation Update' was both posted and bumped from the Home Page (www.trinitycollege.com) during December 2016.

Appendix K. Ideas Template for Sal and Chad (Chad's Bag)

This record of the 'ideas template' developed by Sal and Chad shows all of the devices used in their first four lessons. None were used in lessons five or six because those lessons were spent discussing the examination and practicing technical skills such as sight reading and arpeggios. Each use of a device is labelled with a brief description of the context and is accompanied with the line number in the written transcription of the lesson dialogue.

Sal & Chad's Improvisation Ideas Template

Devices	**Lesson 1**	**Lesson 2**	**Lesson 3**	**Lesson 4**	**Lessons 5 & 6**
Quoting melodic phrases (from self or others)	From someone else (16). From self (89, 98).			(35-38)	N/A because the lesson recapped the exam. There was no improvisation.
Repeating rhythmic phrases.	101				
Guide tone lines		58-59	27-31	(39-49)	
Chord tones: Highlighted			25		
Using upper-structure chord tones	G triad over an A7 (29)		11		
Arpeggios from the third of the chord.	'St. Louis Blues pattern' (62, 106, 113)	39			
Transposing melodic patterns to different chords.		(18, 51) Thinking ahead to transpose (26) IKEA metaphor (29, 31; 42). Placing an improvisation over a different tune with similar chords (48).			
Enclosing	(27, 64, 75)				
Anticipating a Chord Change	Pre-meditating (32, 34)				
Chromatic sequence to a target (requires anticipating the target).	i.e. Parker's *Now's the Time* solo (46, 50). Flat 7 to the root (107).				

	Can also re-contextualise a 'wrong' note into a 'right one'.				
Using a strong rhythm to outline strong important beats.	(71). Strong rhythm can also make phrases/notes sound right (102).				
Rhythm as a variation		Adding a slight swing feel, "sitting back on the rhythm" (16) or using a Latin (29).	Relaxing the rhythm so as not to rush *Yardbird Suite* (15).	Repetition of chord tones (55-67). Change of feel (72-74).	
Blues scales		Using a flattened fifth (51)			
Flags "Here I Am!"		For feeling of comfort and confidence (42). For a confident space (46). Re-establish self when lost (51-53).			
Leaving Space		Helps settle in. Associated with planting a flag (42).		(28-31)	
Wrong notes	Made right by the next note (52-54).			Re-contextualised via Assertive Playing (66)	
Passing notes			To link chord tones (23)	'auxiliary' and 'diatonic' (72-74)	
Spatial descriptions			Playing chords "behind" or "over the top" of you. "Underneath" and "on top" (38)	'Space between the playing is added by Chad (28-31) Mapping the chords (76) Horizontal movement of/in chords (34)	
Octave displacement				Octave key (86-90)	
Combining devices	strong rhythm + enclosure (see 69-71).			Octave, passing notes, guide tones, rhythm for aural task (39-60)	
Reference to past masters	Miles Davis' quoting (89). Charlie Parker "pinching" (98) Parker's Enclosing (98) Parker's Chromatic Approach (50)		The use of upper-structures is linked to John Coltrane (11). Parker's tone & singing (17). M. Davis next note importance (78)	M. Davis' next note makes the current right (78). Miles Davis' quoting (89). Charlie Parker's Enclosing (98).	

Appendix L. Examination Results

Exemplar 1: TCL Examination Report. Jazz Saxophone Grade 7.

The following figures were created by transferring the comments and marks from a photograph that I took of the examiner comment sheets during the last observation. Before taking the photograph, I asked the permission of the candidate and his/her parents. I did not include the actual photographs of the comments because of ethical concerns regarding protecting the identities of the candidate and examiner (i.e. identifiable handwriting, names and identification numbers).

Comments from the TCL Grade 7 Jazz Saxophone exam.

Performance Piece	Examiner's Comments	Fluency & Accuracy	Technical Facility	Communication & Interpretation	Marks
Yardbird Suite	'Well balanced phrasing with the backing track and some good dynamics and tonal contrast. Rhythm was mainly secure and a feeling for the _____ _____' (last two words are illegible).	6/7	6/7	6/8	18/22
The Camel	'Some well-articulated phrases here with secure technique on the note attack. The second section was well contrasted with a mellow tone on the deeper notes'	6/7	6/7	7/8	19/22
Tough Guys!		5/7	5/7	6/8	16/22
Technical Work	The scales and arpeggios were all well-known and technique was mainly secure. A good tempo for each scale was well sustained.				12/14
Sight Reading	A fairly good attempt at a fast tempo but there were pitch and rhythm slips throughout.				7/10
Test 2 Improvisation	Some good musical ideas here with well ___ understand of the chords.				10/10
General Comments	[left blank by the examiner]				
Total					82/100

Exemplar 2: TCL Examination Report. Trumpet Grade 7 Trumpet Grade 7.

Performance Piece	Examiner's Comments	Fluency & Accuracy	Technical Facility	Communication & Interpretation	Marks
Chikona	'A strong sense of rhythm and phrasing. Good use of dynamics.'	7/7	7/7	7/8	21/22
Buster Strikes Back	'Well executed attacks shaped the overall phrases effectively. Good sense of rhythmic and articulation contrast. Excellent tone.'	6/7	6/7	7/8	19/22
Funk	'Clearly played with a good feel but unsteady rhythm. Uncomfortable with the fast tempo.'	6/7	5/7	7/8	18/22
Technical Work	Secure rhythm and a good tempo for each. Well done!				14/14
Sight Reading	Good attempt. Errors in key signature. Dynamics often missed.				6/10
Test 2 Improvisation	Excellent use of the full range of the instrument. Creative development of the material.				10/10
General Comments	[left blank by the examiner]				
Total					88/100

Exemplar 3: ABRSM Examination Report. Jazz Flute Grade 4.

Performance Piece	Examiner's Comments	Marks
A1 (Basin Street)	This had a lively pulse leading to a good rhythmic feel. Secure tone and intonation. More dynamic contrast could have been added overall.	26 30 [20]
C1 (Fungii Mama)	Again, a good rhythmic feel. Secure phrasing. Some note slips.	27 30 [20]
B2 (Fotografia)	A very vivid performance with convincing projection of melodic character.	28 30 [20]
Scales and Arpeggios	Keys were known and scales were steadily played. Some note slips with and trouble with fluent swing. Overall good speed and well known. Technique was mainly secure.	17 21 [14]
Sight Reading or Quick Study	The responses were fluent and prompt. Imaginative developments. There was scope for more nuanced musical shaping throughout.	19 21 [14]
Aural Tests	Good rhythmic awareness. Some vagueness in singing. Overall prompt and confident responses.	16 18 [12]
Additional Comments	An excellent all-round performance and result.	
Total		133
Maximum [Pass] 150 [100] **Pass** 100 **Merit** 120 **Distinction** 130		

Appendix M. Questions Accompanying Observations

Questions for the qualitative semi-structured interviews (3.3.2.2)

The following questions were asked by the researcher during the semi-structured interviews with all of the teachers and students prior to commencing the observations. The questions were designed to elicit supplementary information about the teachers', students' and parents' experiences and understandings in relation to music, music improvisation and graded music examinations.

Questions for teachers

Background and education questions

- How did you start making music?
- Tell me about some of the experiences, people or events that have been a large influence on your musicianship?
- What did you enjoy most when you were taking music lessons? How do you pass on those experiences in your own teaching?
- Did you take examinations as a student? Please tell me about your experiences (Which examination boards, genres and levels)?

Perceptions of improvisation and assessment

- Tell me about how you were first introduced to improvisation.
- How would you define improvisation?
- How is improvisation a part of your music making?
- How is improvisation a part of your teaching practice?
- Please describe how you practice improvisation. Do you use any particular software, mp3s or other tools?
- Which of these materials do you use when you teach improvisation?
- When and where do you think improvisation is important?
- What do you think about the inclusion of improvisation in graded examinations?
- I've noticed that there are more options for improvisation than there used to be. Why do you think that is?
- What is your understanding of how improvisation is assessed in graded music examinations? Is this different than how improvisation is assessed outside of the context of a graded music exam?

Questions for students

Background and education questions

- What are you really good at?
- How did you start making music? Was there something special that you saw or heard?
- What types of things have you studied so far in your music lessons?
- What did you enjoy doing in music?
- Does a member of your family play an instrument or sing? Which one(s)?
- What about your friends, do any of them play an instrument or sing? Tell me about them.
- Do you ever just think about music? What do you think?

About examinations

- Have you ever taken a music exam before? What was it like?
- What was the examiner like?
- Who decided that you should do the exam?
- What did the examiner say about your performance? Did your teacher agree? What about you, did you agree? What did your parents think?

Perceptions of improvisation and assessment

- Did you improvise in the exam?
- How did the examiner know what mark to give to your improvisation?
- If you could tell the examiner something about your improvising that they didn't know, what would it be?
- How do you practice improvisation? Do you use any particular software, mp3s or other tools?
- Do you have any improvisation tips for me?
- If you had to describe improvisation, what would you say?
- Why is improvisation important?

Questions for Parents

Background and education questions

- Did you ever sing or play an instrument?
- What did/do you enjoy most about music?

- Did you ever take a graded exam? What was it like?
- Can you tell me about any special music experiences that have really stayed with you?
- Are there any music-makers in your family?
- Is music important to you? Why?
- Your child is learning to play an instrument. Can you tell me how that came about?

For background about improvisation

- Can you give me a few examples of music improvisation?
- How would you define improvisation?
- If your child is practicing improvisation or practicing written music, do you hear a difference? Can you describe that difference?
- Does your involvement with your child's music making differ whether they are practicing improvisation or practicing a written piece of music?
- What are some of your understandings about improvisation in graded music examinations? What do you think are some of the benefits and drawbacks?

Appendix N. Questions for Examination Boards

Initial interview questions for syllabus authors:

- How would you describe the place of improvisation within the classical and jazz curricula?
- Tell me about the origins of improvisation within the classical and jazz syllabuses.
- Has the idea behind improvisation in jazz changed since you've been working on it? Have you tried to include something new or move in a particular direction?
- What are the reasons for the choices for the instruments that are included in the jazz syllabus and those that are not? (I know that jazz obviously has instruments that are associated with it, but is there ever a thought of say, "Let's make jazz viola or jazz oboe?").
- When assessing candidates, how do candidate's intentions with the improvisation factor in?
- Are there specific things that you've considered, "This is assessable, or this is not assessable?" How are such decisions made?
- Can you tell me about that process for designing a new syllabus or updating a syllabus with improvisation? What is the process? Is there an area that you start with and then move on from there? How does it work?
- Will you please describe the panel of experts that contribute to the improvisation within the classical and jazz curricula?
- How is improvisation affected on each level by the time limits?
- Has the growth of improvisation within the jazz curricula made its way to the classical syllabus? Are there plans to include more improvisation in the future?
- One thing that interests me that I come across in the literature is assessing not just improvisation, but any music by whether it's a product or whether it's a process. Is this an issue that has been considered within your examination board and what are your thoughts?
- Is there a definition within your board of what improvisation is and/or what it is in context of the examinations?

Questioned posed after the data analysis during the writing of Chapter Four.

- A reoccurring theme was that the improvisation assessment within the performance section of a jazz exam is not valid because candidates can perform a memorized improvisation or a spontaneous one. How do you think this impacts the validity of the exams?
- Does an exam that requires improvisation (e.g. Jazz Saxophone Grade 7) theoretically require the same amount of preparation hours as an exam without improvisation? If so, are candidates learning improvisation held to the same standard when they complete other tasks such as sight reading? Does choosing improvisation put the candidate at a disadvantage?

Trinity College London:

- What the difference is regarding whether the candidate chooses to improvise during one or two pieces makes to the assessment. This question also arose during the jazz saxophone lessons that I observed with the student asking if it was more advantageous to 1) improvise in two pieces to show diversity or 2) improvise during one to show their best and hide the two pieces that they were weaker at improvising with. The student also questioned whether improvising over one piece was then double-weighted to match a performance with two improvisations.
- How do you expect the technical studies to be incorporated into the improvisation assessments?

ABRSM:

- The terms ‘improvisation’ and ‘solo’ are used interchangeably in the marking rubric. Is there a difference and if so what?
- Does the term ‘embellishment’, which is used in the ‘performance’ category of the rubric, refer to improvisation?

Appendix O. Risk Assessment Forms

Student Name	Patrick Olsen
Email	pgo22@cam.ac.uk
Supervisor(s)	Dr Sue Brindley
Title of Registration Proposal	Improvisation in formal graded music examinations: Researching assessment understandings and practices.

Research activity to be undertaken	Observations of one-to-one music lessons. Interviews with two students, parents and teachers of music
Location of research	One instrumental music school in London, UK.
If travelling abroad, date of departure:	N/A
List particular hazards associated with the activity, for example, will there be any personal safety issues? List only hazards which you could reasonably expect to result in harm to you or others under the conditions in which you are working.	
There are no physical safety issues. I will be observing teenage students, their parents and music teachers about their understandings of music improvisation in graded music examinations. Consent and anonymity are carefully put in place.	
Are the risks adequately controlled? If so, list the existing controls: List the precautions you have already taken against the risks from the hazards you have identified or make a note where this information may be found.	
All participants will be made aware of informed consent and have their identities protected during the research.	
Do any other Risk Assessments relate to this activity?	
No.	

Checklist

Have you specified:

- When the activity will take place? Yes.
- Who is involved? Yes.
- What the activity will involve? Yes
- The purpose of the activity? Yes
- If there are there any special risks? Yes

Have you:

- Cross referenced to other risk assessments? No
- Put travel arrangements in place? Yes
- Checked health issues? N/A
- Checked equipment requirements? Yes
- Checked insurance issues? Yes
- Where the information is kept/available? Yes
- Are all involved informed? Yes

Form completed by (signature): Date: **21 May2015**

Name (in capitals): **Patrick Olsen**

Appendix P. Interview Forms: Information for Participants

What is the purpose of this interview?

This interview is part of a pilot study for a PhD thesis that examines the assessment of improvisation in graded music examinations. This pilot study is testing methods for collecting information about how improvisation is being defined, practiced, assessed and understood in the contexts of graded music examinations.

Why have I been asked to participate?

The researcher has identified your professional role as being influential into the creation of music examination syllabuses. In addition, the researcher believes that you have insight about the reasoning and decision making of examination boards that are not available in a library.

Do I need to take part in the interview and answer all of the questions?

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part in the interview and have your words be a part of the PhD pilot study and associated PhD thesis. If you consent to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form and be given this sheet to keep. If you decide to take part in the research, you may still feel free to withdraw at any point without stating a reason.

What will the interview be like?

The interview will be approximately one hour long and be conducted in a place convenient to you. It would be preferable to the researcher if the interview could be conducted at your work place so that the natural setting in which you work can be observed.

Is everything I say being recorded?

The researcher will audio record the interview and announce to you when they are turning on/off the recorder. The recorded interview will be transcribed and kept in the sole possession of the researcher. Before the PhD thesis is completed, all instances that include quotations from your interview will be shown to you for your approval. Quotes that you do not approve of will not be used by the researcher.

In accordance with British Psychological Association guidelines for published information, all data will be held for five years. Data that is not published will be held for one year.

What are the benefits of taking part in the research?

Taking part in the research will help to create a better understanding of assessment of music improvisation within graded music examinations. Information in the completed thesis will be of benefit to you, the professional organisation with whom you work, in addition to interested music teachers and students.

Where can I get additional information?

For further information or to voice concerns, please contact the researcher, Patrick Olsen, by emailing: pgo22@cam.ac.uk. Patrick Olsen is currently a PhD at the Faculty of Education at The University of Cambridge. His supervisor is Dr Pamela Burnard.

Thank you for your time.

Interview Consent Form

Research Project: Improvisation in Formal Graded Music Examinations
Researcher: Patrick Olsen, PhD researcher at the Faculty of Education, the University of Cambridge. pgo22@cam.ac.uk
Please read the following statements. If you agree to them, then sign and date the bottom of the page to indicate your consent to being interviewed by the researcher.

- I confirm that I have read and understand the accompanying information sheet and that the research has given me the opportunity to ask questions.
- I agree to take part in the interviews and the associated study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without providing a reason. All I need to do is notify the researcher.
- I agree to allow the interviews to be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher.
- I understand that all data will be made anonymous and securely stored by the researcher. All data may be used in the PhD thesis, publications such as journal articles, or conference presentations. Any quotations from this interview will be shown to me before publication for my approval.

Name of Participant (clearly print)	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher (clearly print)	Date	Signature

Observation Consent Form: Head of Instrumental Music School

Research Project: Assessment of Music Improvisation Pilot Study
Researcher: Patrick Olsen, PhD researcher at the Faculty of Education, the University of Cambridge. pgo22@cam.ac.uk
Please read the following statements. If you agree to them, then sign and date the bottom of the page to indicate your consent.

- This study has been explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask further questions.
- The researcher has informed me of my right to withdraw consent and participation in the research at any time.
- The parents/ legal guardians of each participant under 18 years old have been fully informed about the nature of this research.
- Parents/ legal guardians of participants under 18 years old have been notified of their right to withdraw their child from participating in this study.
- I agree to allow the interview to be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher.
- I understand that all data will be made anonymous and securely stored by the researcher. All data may be used in the PhD thesis, publications such as journal articles, or conference presentations.

Name of Participant (clearly print)	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher (clearly print)	Date	Signature

Observation Consent Form: Parent/ legal guardian

Research Project: Improvisation in Formal Graded Music Examinations

Researcher: Patrick Olsen, PhD researcher at the Faculty of Education, the University of Cambridge. pgo22@cam.ac.uk

Please read the following statements. If you agree to them, please sign and date the bottom of the page to indicate your consent.

- This study has been explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask further questions.
- The researcher has informed me of my right to withdraw consent and participation in the research at any time.
- I agree to allow my daughter/son to participate in the research study.
- I understand my daughter/son's participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time without stating a reason.
- I agree to allow the observation of my daughter/son's instrumental music class to be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher.
- I understand that all data will be made anonymous and securely stored by the researcher. All data may be used in the PhD thesis, publications such as journal articles, or conference presentations.

_____ _____ _____

Name of Parent (clearly print) Date Signature

_____

Name of Student (clearly print)

What is the purpose of this research?

This study is part of a pilot study for a PhD thesis that examines the assessment of improvisation in graded music examinations. This pilot study is testing methods for collecting information about how improvisation is being defined, practiced, assessed and understood in the contexts of graded music examinations. The particular method being used in this case is the observation of an instrumental music class by the researcher. Should your daughter/son take part, one of their instrumental music lessons will be observed by a researcher that will make notes and also make an audio recording of the lesson.

Why has my daughter/son been asked to participate?

The principal of your daughter/son's music school was asked by the researcher to recommend students that will be taking a graded examination that includes music improvisation as part of the assessment.

Does my daughter/son need to take part in this study?

It is up to you and your daughter/son to decide whether or not to participate. If you agree to participate, you will be given this information form and asked to complete a consent form. After signing the consent form, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. No reason needs to be given to withdraw.

What are the benefits of agreeing to be a part of the research?

Your daughter/son will get to be a part of research that will lead to a clearer understanding of improvisation in graded music examinations.

What are the possible concerns about being a part of the research?

The observations may be followed with a short interview that may take up to 20 minutes of you and your daughter/son's time. Comments and music played by your daughter/son may be used in a PhD thesis, journal articles or presentations. All data will be kept anonymous and the name of your child, their teacher and their school will be given pseudonyms.

You will be free to turn off any recording equipment at any time should you wish to. You will not be required to provide an explanation for doing so.

Will my daughter/son be recorded in any way?

The observed music lesson will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. All data will be kept secure and seen only by the researcher and his supervisor.

What will become of the results of this study?

Observation of your daughter/son's instrumental music class is part of a pilot study used to improve the research design of a larger PhD thesis. Should you wish to obtain a copy of the completed pilot study, one can be requested from the researcher at: pgo22@cam.ac.uk

Who is organising this research?

My name is Patrick Olsen. I am a PhD researcher at the Faculty of Education at The University of Cambridge. My supervisor is Dr Pamela Burnard (pab61@cam.ac.uk).

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Research Information

The research:

My name is Patrick Olsen, is a 2nd year PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge under the supervision of Professor Pamela Burnard (pab61@cam.ac.uk). I am researching how improvisation is defined, practiced and assessed in the context of graded music examinations. My research questions arose during my professional experience as a music teacher.

Specifics:

To get a better understanding of how improvisation and assessment occur in instrumental music lessons, I will be conducting observations of instrumental music lessons. I would like to observe your daughter/son music lesson six times between March and June 2016. This involves making a video/audio recording of each lesson. In addition, I would like to briefly interview you and your daughter/son prior to the first observation and after the last observation in order to learn more about your music-related experiences. To clarify some of my observations, I may also ask you or your daughter/son short questions after the lessons. All recordings will be kept secure at the Faculty of Education and can only be accessed by my supervisor and me. In accordance with Faculty of Education policy, all video and audio recordings will be erased shortly after the final submission of my thesis.

Participation:

After consultation about the specifics of this research, Cambridgeshire Music has agreed to recommend instrumental music students that will be working towards a graded examination that includes music improvisation as part of the assessment.

It is up to you and your daughter/son to decide whether or not to participate. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form (located on the following page). You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. No reason needs to be given. If you choose to withdraw, all recordings will be immediately erased.

Benefits:

Your participation has the potential to benefit music teachers, students and parents by bringing greater clarity and understanding regarding the assessment of music improvisation in music exams.

Possible concerns:

The interviews will take a few minutes of you and your daughter/son's time. Any comments made by you or your daughter/son may be transcribed and used in my PhD thesis, journal articles or presentations. All data will be kept anonymous and the name of your child, the music teacher and Cambridgeshire Music will be given pseudonyms. You will be free to turn off any recording equipment at any time and would not be required to provide an explanation for doing so.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Please read and sign the following page.

Observation Consent Form: Parent/ legal guardian

Research Project: Improvisation in Formal Graded Music Examinations

Researcher: Patrick Olsen, PhD 2nd year at the Faculty of Education, the University of Cambridge (pgo22@cam.ac.uk).

Please read the following statements. If you agree to them, please sign and date the bottom of the page to indicate your consent.

- This study has been explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask further questions.
- I agree to allow my daughter/son to participate in the research study.
- I understand my daughter/son's participation is voluntary and that we are free to withdraw from this research at any time without giving a reason.
- I agree to allow the researcher, Patrick Olsen, to observe and make video/audio recordings of six of my daughter/son's instrumental music lessons between March and June 2016.
- I understand that all data will be made anonymous and securely stored by the researcher. All data may be used in the PhD thesis, publications such as journal articles, or conference presentations. All recordings will be erased shortly after the final submission of the PhD thesis.

Name of Parent (clearly print)	Date	Signature
Name of Student (clearly print)		
Name of Researcher (clearly print)	Date	Signature

Observation Consent Form: Instrumental music teacher

Research Project: Improvisation in Formal Graded Music Examinations

Researcher: Patrick Olsen, PhD 2nd year at the Faculty of Education, the University of Cambridge (pgo22@cam.ac.uk).

Please read the following statements. If you agree to them, then please sign and date the bottom of the page to indicate your consent.

- This study has been explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask further questions.
- The researcher has informed me of my right to withdraw consent and participation in the research at any time. No reason for withdraw need to be given.
- The parents/ legal guardians of each participant under 18 years old have been fully informed about the nature of this research.
- I agree to allow Patrick Olsen to observe and video record six of my lessons between March and June 2016.
- I understand that all data will be made anonymous and securely stored by the researcher. All recordings will be destroyed shortly after final submission of the thesis, but written transcriptions of those recordings may be used in the PhD thesis, publications such as journal articles, or conference presentations.

Name of Participant (clearly print)	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher (clearly print)	Date	Signature